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ARISTOTELIAN AND PSEUDO-ARISTOTELIAN ELEMENTS

IN CORNEILLE'S

TRAGEDIES

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FOREWORD

The following study was originally suggested in a course in French Criticism given by Professor Edwin P. Dargan. It has been brought to its present form under the untiring direction of Professor William A. Nitze, Head of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago. To Professor Nitze a very special debt of gratitude is due, not only for his constant guidance and encouragement during the progress of this dissertation, but also for the enthusiastic interest in graduate studies with which he inspired me when I was a student in his classes.

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E. M.

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# ARISTOTELIAN AND PSEUDO-ARISTOTELIAN ELEMENTS

## IN

### CORNEILLE'S TRAGEDIES

#### OUTLINE

Introduction: Exposition of Plan

Chapter I - Aristotle's Poetics

Chapter II - The Italian Critics

Chapter III - French Dramatic Theory before Corneille

Chapter IV - Corneille's Early Plays

Chapter V - Le Cid - The Quarrel of the Cid

Chapter VI - Horace

Chapter VII - Cinna

Chapter VIII - Polyeucte

Chapter IX - Pompée

Chapter X - Rodogune

Chapter XI - Théodore

Chapter XII - Héraclius

Chapter XIII - Don Sanche

Chapter XIV - Nicomède

Chapter XV - Pertharite

Chapter XVI - Discours and Examens

Conclusion: Summary

Bibliography







## ARISTOTELIAN AND PSEUDO-ARISTOTELIAN ELEMENTS

## IN CORNEILLE'S TRAGEDIES

Introduction

A study of the Aristotelian and more particularly the pseudo-Aristotelian elements in Corneille's tragedies is of particular interest to students of dramatic theories, because the period covered by these plays, from 1630 to 1660 approximately, represents the introduction, evolution, and final establishment of the classic tragedy in France. Much has been written on the dramatic theories of Corneille, as is obvious from the bibliography given at the end of this thesis. But practically all this work (1) has been based on the critical writings of Corneille, that is, the Examens and the three Discours of 1660. It must be remembered that what Corneille wrote in the Examens and Discours was the result of much concentrated study on the Poetics of Aristotle and his Italian commentators. During this long study, Corneille learned many things of which he had been entirely ignorant when he wrote his masterpieces. So that what we read about the Cid, or Horace or Cinna, in the Examens or Discours, gives no reliable indications as to the dramatic technique followed by Corneille when he wrote those plays.

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(1) Cf. Bibliography under Föhm, Lemaître. The works of these critics deal with Corneille's doctrine as formulated in 1660.





The purpose of the present investigation is to determine primarily from the lines of the plays themselves Corneille's interpretation and use of Aristotelian doctrine. A final chapter will discuss the critical writings of 1660, the Examens and Discours, as representing a further stage of Corneille's dramatic evolution.

Before beginning our study of Corneille's tragedies, it will be necessary to make an analysis of the original Aristotelian doctrine, as it exists in the Greek Poetics, and to give a brief sketch of the development of this doctrine by the Italian Renaissance critics. It will not be possible to give a full treatment of the Italian Poetic Arts, as this would carry us beyond the bounds of a dissertation.(1) A third chapter will be devoted to the French predecessors of Corneille, both as regards their dramatic theories, and as to the stage conditions under which they worked. This will cover the period from 1625 (2) to 1629, the date at which Corneille first came in contact with the Republic of Letters and its legislators.

After considering briefly the plays before the Cid, the four great masterpieces (Le Cid, Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte), will be treated very fully. In the later period, Rodogune, Héraclius, and Nicomède will be discussed in some detail, as having each its individual importance in the development of the Cornelian tragedy. Pompée, Théodore, Don Sanche, and

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(1) Ample bibliographical material will be indicated for more detailed study.

(2) More exactly 1623, date of Chapelain's Préface de l'Adone.





Pertharite will receive much slighter treatment, in proportion to their lesser importance for our purposes.(1) We shall close our study of the tragedies themselves with this last play before Corneille's long retirement from the stage, for those written during the period from OEdipe to Suréna add nothing new to Corneille's practice or theories.

In the course of this study, we shall establish a curve of development in Corneille's Aristotelianism, beginning with the Cid, and rising through the Quarrel of the Cid, up to Horace and Cinna, and descending through Polyeucte to Héraclius and Rodogune. These last two represent the romanesque play, of which Corneille was so fond, and to which he inevitably reverted. Since we are chiefly concerned with the more classical elements in Corneille's dramatic system, we shall devote most of our study to the period from the Cid through Polyeucte.

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(1) Andromède has been omitted as not being strictly a tragedy. It has been omitted similarly by Gustave Lanson in his most recent treatment of French tragedy: Esquisse de la Tragédie Française. New York, 1920.





## CHAPTER I - ARISTOTLE'S POETICS (1)

Before one can study profitably Aristotle's theory of poetry, it is necessary to understand first the general doctrine of "Imitation". As used in the Poetics, this term has reference to Poetic Truth or Verisimilitude, and has nothing to do with a slavish copying of models. Nor is the imitation of the artist inferior to the original in Nature, as Plato had contended, for the artist seeks not to reproduce any natural object, but rather the artistry of Nature. In the Aristotelian sense, 'Nature' is "not the world of created things, it is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe".(2)

### VERISIMILITUDE

Nature, however, is bound by certain material limitations, and can realize only imperfectly her own ideals. It is here that Art, Poetic Truth, has its play, for Art is able to fulfill Nature's unfulfilled intentions. Art transcends Nature's imperfect efforts by realizing, in the world of Poetic Truth, those ideas which are submerged by obstacles in the world of reality. To produce perfect results, Art must supplement Nature, but in following Nature's own

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- (1) All references to, and quotations from the Poetics are taken from the English translation of S. H. Butcher, in his volume entitled, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, London, 1911.
- (2) Butcher, op. cit., p. 116.





processes. Here then is the key to Aristotle's doctrine: "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen".(1) It is not necessary to have an actual object before your eyes, but to have an idealized image before your mind. Thus it becomes immediately manifest that Poetry is a higher art than History, since the latter tells only that which has happened, whereas Poetry tells of that which ought to have happened, according to the laws of 'probability or necessity'.(2) Poetry expresses the universal element in human nature, removing from it all that is momentary, accidental, and dependent upon the imperfections of Nature herself. From this point of view, the world of actual truth and the world of poetic truth are not opposites, but the latter continues the processes and methods of Nature, unhampered by chance disturbances and interruptions. It is at this point that one can explain the terms 'letter' and 'ought to be', so frequently used in the Poetics. They have no reference to a moral standard, as was so wrongly interpreted throughout the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, but represent the fulfillment, to a higher degree, of Nature's ideal plan. In Poetry, the characters must be ideal types, and "the ideal type must surpass the actual", (3) must be aesthetically 'better', more nearly perfect, than the real.

It is the rigorous following of the laws of Nature that Aristotle demands in his requirement of the 'laws of

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(1) Poetics, ch. IX.

(2) Ibid. ch. IX

(3) Ibid. ch. XXV





probability or necessity', or what we now term Poetic Truth or Verisimilitude. But for the full understanding of the 'probable' in the Aristotelian sense, we must grasp the conception which Butcher has aptly expressed in his discussion of the Poetics when he says, "the incidents of every tragedy worthy of the name are improbable if measured by the likelihood of their everyday occurrence,--improbable in the same degree in which characters capable of great deeds and great passions are rare".(1) So true is it that the 'probable' does not have reference to everyday life that Aristotle says in one place, "It is probable that many things should happen contrary to probability", (2) which, when explained, means that in the world of actuality, it is probable that through the incidents of chance, many things should happen quite out of harmony with the larger probability of the ultimate design of the universe. It is these very vagaries of chance that Aristotle would reject in Poetry, since they take account of actual, not ideal, occurrences. Not only are the subjects of most tragedies improbable in a literal sense, but they are recognized to be fictions. But so far from accepting the criticism, Aristotle replies that while such actions never occurred, they are in perfect conformity with the principles and ideals of Nature.(3)

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(1) Butcher, op. cit., pp. 165, 166. (2) Poetics XVIII

(3) Poetics IX. In addition to the larger application, the rule of 'probability or necessity' deals also, more specifically, with the internal structure of the poem, and governs the sequence of events, thus insuring unity for the whole. Cf. infra, section on Unities, p. 22.





From all this it would appear that the Poet should never relate actual happenings, and yet all of the best-known Greek tragedies told the stories of their national, legendary history. The rule of the ideal truth does not exclude the 'real events'; yet only a few of the accepted myths can satisfy the demands of Tragedy. If the poet represents a real event, it must have an inherent air of probability; otherwise it will withstand poetic treatment. In creating new subjects, the guiding principle is: "Probable improbabilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities." (1) This dictum is twice set forth in the Poetics. (2) The artist must be skilful in handling fictions, and provided he nowhere violate in the course of the tragedy, the fundamental law of Poetic truth, which is probability, the whole will be verisimilar and in accord with the requirements of the art. Aside from real events and carefully constructed imaginary events, the poet may also use those legends which have been accepted by the people for ages. In this case, care must be taken not to destroy the framework of the story, or so alter any of the characters as to make them different from the popular conception of them. (3)

The poet must, then, imitate Nature, not in her physical manifestations, but according to her eternal

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1. Poetics XXIV
2. Poetics XXV
3. Poetics XX





principles, thus carrying out in Art the unrealized ideals of Nature. By Nature is understood human nature, and the poet should depict people, not as they are, but as they ought to be, thus revealing the universal element in human nature.

### KATHARSIS

Before turning to a discussion of the several parts of Tragedy, let us take up now a consideration of the purpose served by this particular type of poetry. One of the most frequently misinterpreted passages of the Poetics is that concerning the function of Tragedy. In the definition given in Chapter VI of the Poetics, Aristotle says, "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."<sup>(1)</sup> Since this Katharsis is the end and function of tragedy, it becomes at once a pivotal point. In the Renaissance it was variously interpreted, but in general, an ethical purgation was the accepted meaning.<sup>(2)</sup> This was the interpretation given by Corneille and Racine, but as will be amply proven, it was not the true meaning of Aristotle.

In fact, Aristotle was the first to express the theory that the sole end of poetry is to give pleasure, and since Tragedy is the highest form of poetry,<sup>(3)</sup> it follows that Tragedy should give the highest pleasure. This in nowise precludes the possibilities of moral uplift, but this latter

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1. Poetics VI

2. Spingarn, Joel: A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 2nd edition, New York, 1908, p. 75. Also of. infra, ch. 2.

3. Poetics IV Butcher, op. cit. p. 215.





should not be foremost in the mind of the poet. His function is to delight, not to instruct. Aristotle was quite alone among the Greeks in this attitude, for poetry had been regarded merely as a school of morals. Plato, indeed, banished from his Ideal Republic all poetry except the strictly didactic.(1) In the Poetics, no mention is made of an ethical influence in poetry, nor is there any criticism in the Poetics based on ethical values. But the type of pleasure proper to Tragedy demands that the action and the characters be of a higher rather than a lower order. Here again, however, it should be remarked that Aristotle does not reject absolutely all morally 'bad' characters. If the internal dramatic 'necessity' requires the presence or introduction of a morally depraved character, for the purpose of contrast, this is considered sufficient ground for its representation on the stage. Through the close relation between the characters of the drama and its purposes, it is very easy to be lead from a purely aesthetic point of view to the ethical; and Aristotle is at many points in the Poetics dangerously near losing sight of his first tenet.(2)

Thus it is not remarkable, particularly in view of the fact that Horace strengthened the idea of a didactic function in poetry(3) that the later critics entirely misconceived Aristotle's original doctrine. It is only through very close study that one can analyse Aristotle's thought correctly. In

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1. Butcher, op.cit. p. 221.

2. Ibid. p. 229.

3. Horace, Ars Poetica C. 343: Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci. cf. infra ch. II.





fact, it is very patent that even in the mind of Aristotle himself, there was no clearly-marked dividing line between the different types of superiority, moral or other. In default of any specific guidance from Aristotle, the Italian commentators followed Horace, unconsciously at times, and the ethical interpretation became widespread.

It was not until very modern times that the aesthetic interpretation of Aristotle's Katharsis was given serious attention. Bernays(1) in 1857, gave the first elaboration of this theory, and by him the term is understood to mean that Tragedy excites the emotions of pity and fear, and by the act of excitation, affords a pleasurable relief. This pleasure, from the excitation of pity and fear, can come only through purging the emotions of the personal element, and raising them to a point of universality. Butcher gives a very clear explanation of this idea:(2) "Tragedy is a vent for the particular emotions of pity and fear . . . . . It excites emotion, however, only to allay it. Pity and fear, artificially stirred, expel the latent pity and fear which we bring with us from real life, or at least, such elements in them as are disquieting. In the pleasurable calm which follows when the passion is spent, an emotional cure has been wrought." Fairchild, in an article in the Classical Journal (3) analyses Katharsis as "a form or type of inner experience through which in part we come to know the nature of Tragedy",

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1. Cf. Bernays, Jacob: Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie der Dramas Berlin, 1880.
  2. Ibid. p. 242.
  3. Fairchild, G.H.R. "Aristotle's Doctrine of Katharsis", Classical Journal, vol. XII, p. 47.







and he too holds that it means "the purification, through the aesthetic awakening of pity and fear, of the morbid, painful, disquieting element that belongs to these emotions as we know them in real or everyday life." This purgation is essentially not ethical, but aesthetic. That this is the true meaning of the Aristotelian Katharsis can scarcely be doubted, when one realizes that nowhere else throughout the Poetics, is there any criticism of a purely moral nature. The essence of Aristotle's doctrine of Poetry is, at all times, that the purpose of poetry is to delight. This apparent inconsistency was first noted by Castelvetro(1), who comments that it is not worthy of the great master of criticism to have put Tragedy on a moral basis. Castelvetro himself holds generally to the aesthetic interpretation, although he believes himself in contradiction with Aristotle on this point. To the mind of the Renaissance critic, the term 'purgation' could not be other than essentially ethical. Thus the true meaning was lost until the nineteenth century, the period of aesthetic awakening.

Now as to what arouses this Pity and Fear. in chapter XIV of the Poetics, Aristotle says, "Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that even without the aid of the eye, he who

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1. Cf. infra, ch. II. While Minturno in 1563 seems to have realized that Aristotle had something more than a didactic function in mind, Castelvetro is the first to discuss the question.





heard the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place." The incidents themselves must then be such as to awaken pity and fear. "Pity," says Aristotle, "is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." (1) Let us examine the situations which, according to Aristotle, are capable of arousing pity and fear. In his own words, "Actions capable of this effect must happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another . . . . When the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another - if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done, these are the situations to be looked for by the poet!" (2)

### PLOT

Of all forms of Poetry, Tragedy is the highest, being the most imitative, that is, the most nearly perfect representation of life. The definition of Tragedy, given in chapter VI of the Poetics, begins: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action . . . . in the form of action, not of narrative . . . ." It is the fact that Tragedy reproduces action by action, that places it above Epic; for the purpose of Poetry, as we have seen in our section on Katharsis, is to raise the emotions to a point of universality. He who witnesses an action, identifies himself more readily with the characters before him, than does he who merely hears a tale recounted.

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1. Poetics XIII
  2. Poetics XIV





Nor must we understand by the term 'Action' mere external phenomena, but rather those moral qualities which make up the physical energy of the individual. Incidents and events are of interest only as they represent an act of the will, or the result of some thought or emotion. Here again there is room for misunderstanding. In emphasizing moral qualities, one is lead to think of character, but Aristotle distinctly and repeatedly says: "Dramatic action . . . is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the action." (1) Nor is this statement contradicted by another passage in the same chapter of the Poetics: "an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain qualities both of character and thought. It is these that determine the qualities of actions themselves; these --- thought and character --- are the two natural causes from which action spring: on these causes, again, all success or failure depends." (2) At first reading, it would appear from this last sentence that character is of first importance, and in fact, if we look again at the first quotation, we shall see that Aristotle was speaking of a 'representation of character'. The dramatic poet should not concern himself with character portrayal, but it is inevitable that each act should reveal character. As Butcher expresses it (3) "It (the word 'action') embraces not only the deeds, the incidents, the situations, but also the mental processes, and the motives which underlie the outward events or which result from them." The chief point at

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1. Poetics VI

2. Poetics VI

3. Op. cit., p. 337.







issue is that Drama must depict processes, not states of being, and must present 'characters in action'.

Now the action of a Tragedy may be long or short - indeed, it may be but the culmination of a particular mood, and expressed in a single moment. Aristotle is very careful not to lay down any definite length for Tragedy, simply stating that drama is the most beautiful which is the longest, provided it is a unified whole, and is not of such a length that it cannot be fully retained by the memory. It is expressly stated in chapter VII, that 'the limit of length in relation to dramatic competition and sensuous presentment, is no part of artistic theory.' This remark seems to have entirely escaped the notice of the later commentators.(1) And it is only as a comment on the general practice of the Greek plays that Aristotle states in chapter V: "Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit." This will come up again for longer discussion in the treatment of the Unities.

There are two possible types of Plot, in Aristotle's system: simple and complex. While he does not reject the simple plan, the whole discussion is devoted to the complex plan. (2) "Plots are either Simple or Complex. . . An action . . . I call Simple, when the change of fortune takes place without Reversal of the Action and without Recognition. A Complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by

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1. Cf. *infra*, ch.II.

2. Poetics X





such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both. These last should arise from the internal structure of the Plot, so that what follows would be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action." Here, as in all other parts of the Tragedy, care must be taken that this change be brought about according to "our rule of probability or necessity." (1) A Reversal of fortune is described as "a change by which a train of action produces the opposite of the effect intended," (2) and Recognition as "a change from the ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune." (3) Plots built on the complicated plan are considered the best, and it should be remembered that Aristotle's criticism has always in view the perfect tragedy.

Of the complex plots, four types are distinguished (4): The tragic act may be planned in ignorance of the identity of the person, but averted by a recognition; it may be carried out in ignorance, and the recognition scene would follow; it may be carried out with full knowledge of the identity of the person; or it may be planned with full knowledge of the person, but given up. These varying types are here given in the order of Aristotle's preferences. It is not clear why Aristotle should prefer the first of these cases, in which the tragic incident is averted, for it would seem to lead to a happy ending, which is expressly criticized by Aristotle. The order was established by Aristotle according to the degree in which each type would arouse pity and fear. Surely our pity and fear would





seem to be greater when the tragic incident actually occurred. In this we must see then one of the inconsistencies of the Poetics.

Aristotle specifies likewise that the 'dénouement' or unravelling should result from the internal structure of the plot: ". . . the unravelling of the Plot, no less than the complication, must arise out of the plot itself, it must not be brought about by the Deus ex Machina."(1) It is on this ground that Aristotle censures the Medea of Euripides.(2)

The requirement that the perfect tragedy should have an unhappy ending is the result of the theory of the tragic Katharsis. Every requirement in the Poetics is based on the consideration of the ultimate function of Tragedy, to arouse pity and fear, and for this an unhappy outcome is necessary. Aristotle expressly disapproves that type of ending in which the good are rewarded and the wicked punished. This is discussed in Poetics XIII: "In the second rank comes the kind of tragedy which some place first.--It has -----an opposite catastrophe for the good and for the bad. It is accounted the best because of the weakness of the spectators; for the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience. The pleasure, however, thence derived is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to Comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies ----quit the stage as friends at the close."

#### CHARACTER

Second in importance to Plot, Aristotle places Character, and

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1. Poetics XV      2. Poetics XV







much time is devoted in the Poetics to the discussion of the perfect tragic hero or heroine. We have already quoted the passage from chapter VI in which he says that Character is subsidiary to Plot, and in the same chapter we read also: "Tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents, mainly with a view to the action." But, as we have said above, it is rather a question of emphasis than of fundamentals, for Aristotle recognizes clearly that no action is possible without displaying traits of character. The criterion for the poet in choosing or fashioning his characters is that they must be such as to arouse pity and fear, since this is the particular function of Tragedy. For just as the subject, so also the characters, must be chosen according as they will serve the end of Tragedy. Aristotle's first requirement for character is that it be good. The poet may not represent "a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity, for this moves neither pity nor fear, it merely shocks us. Now, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity," (1) since this calls forth neither pity nor fear. Our hero should be more good than bad, - "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty." (2) Such a character will rouse our pity and fear, since "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." (3)

The only case which Aristotle does not consider, is

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1. Poetics XIII
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.





that of the good man rising to prosperity, but this would be rejected on the ground of the happy ending, which is not proper to Tragedy. (1) It is to be noted in passing however, that Aristotle recognizes that this type of plot, in which the good are rewarded and the wicked punished, is very common and is the favorite with the audiences. This statement is significant for the later periods of the development of the Drama. ~~#2~~

It is at first rather surprising that Aristotle disapproves of the perfect hero who falls into adversity, since this would seem to call forth most strongly the tragic pity and fear. Yet the pity and fear we should feel for the perfect character would tend to become merged in, and even submerged by, our sense of admiration. While the external ending of a tragedy would be unhappy, the real struggle was a moral one, and the blameless, innocent victim of fate has triumphed through his super-human Will. (3)

Aristotle disposes of the villainous, criminal character very summarily, but we may perhaps be permitted to analyse the situation for ourselves. In the light of those great dramas, since Aristotle's time, which have depicted criminal characters, one wonders if the villain can be presented acceptably to an audience. There can be no doubt that the term 'good' used in the Aristotelian text, refers to moral goodness, (4) and yet the real meaning would seem to be something between 'good' and 'great' or 'serious'. Had Aris-

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1. Poetics XIII. Although Aristotle had before him examples of Greek tragedies ending happily, he requires an unhappy ending for the ideal tragedy.
  2. Cf. infra, ch. 2. p.
  3. This question is of great importance in connection with Corneille's Polyeucte. Cf. infra, ch. VIII, pp. 161, 162.
  4. Butcher, op. cit., pp. 234, 235.





totle worked out consistently the aesthetic doctrine he founded, we should have expected an elaboration on the ideal tragic hero, which we can only supply for ourselves. The tragic hero must be raised above the ordinary human type, but it is not rather in power than in virtue, in powers of intellect or will? It is the "morally trivial", not the "morally bad" that is unbecoming Tragedy.(1)

While crime in itself has no place in Art, it may be so presented as to have tragic dignity. In the words of Butcher (2), "Wickedness on a grand scale, resolute and intellectual, may raise the criminal above the commonplace, and invest him with a sort of dignity. There is something terrible in mere will-power working its evil way, and dominating its surroundings with a superhuman energy. The wreck of such power excites in us a certain tragic sympathy; not indeed the genuine pity which is inspired by unmerited suffering, but a sense of loss and regret over the waste or misuse of gifts so splendid." But, as Butcher later remarks(3), "It is what Aristotle ought to have said, not what he says", that is to say, we may assume that in a more complete theory of Poetry, Aristotle would have treated these different angles, and would have reached such conclusions, as the natural results of his aesthetic principles. It is only an ethical tinge that could reject a Cleopatra or a Medea from the drama, and while we have remarked that Aristotle is not at all times

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1. Ibid. p. 317.      2. Op. cit. pp. 313ff.      3. Ibid. p. 327.





on guard against the moralizing tendencies of his age, yet is significant that Aristotle does not censure Euripides for having used the story of Medea on any moral grounds. Here again, we might remind ourselves that Aristotle was concerning himself only with the perfect tragedy, not with a comprehensive view of tragedy as it existed, even in his own time. Nor can it be too often repeated, that "the contrast is, indeed, a curious one between his own tentative manner and the dogmatic conclusions based on what he has written."(1)

For Aristotle then, the perfect tragic hero is a man of similar characteristics to ourselves, yet sufficiently raised beyond the types of daily life, as to excite our sympathies in his larger destiny. He must fall from good fortune, through some error or frailty. This latter may be inherent in his character, or may be the result of external forces, working upon the destinies of the individuals. Of the two, the former is the more dramatic, for the final outcome is prepared and grows throughout the drama, thus heightening the tragic effect.

As to the treatment of the characters, there are three points which must be strictly observed. The poet should aim at propriety, should aim to make the character verisimilar, and consistent.(2) All three of these requirements are phases of Verisimilitude, or Poetic Truth, and may well be translated 'true to type', 'true to life', and 'true to self'. Rather than follow this order of the Poetics we shall introvert the

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1. Ibid., pp. 328, 329.

2. Poetics XV.



It is not only the *physical* but the *mental* state of the individual that is important in the study of the human mind. The physical state of the body is the basis of the mental state, and the mental state is the basis of the physical state. The two are inseparable and interdependent. The physical state of the body is the basis of the mental state, and the mental state is the basis of the physical state. The two are inseparable and interdependent. The physical state of the body is the basis of the mental state, and the mental state is the basis of the physical state. The two are inseparable and interdependent.

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first two, since 'true to life' covers a larger phase than 'true to type'. The term 'true to life' refers to the universality of the character. As in Plot, so too in character, the poet must avoid the particular, and set in relief characters which represent the ideal working-out of Nature's laws. The term 'true to life' does not mean the character who is most frequently met in everyday experience, but that ideal character who best exemplifies the purpose of human nature. Yet the poet must not disregard the law that in presenting characters from history or received legend, he may not falsify the characters. He may change minor details to bring the facts into accord with the requirements of his art, but he may not uproot popular opinion. People have always had a definite conception of Orestes, of Andromache, of Medea, and that conception must be fulfilled in the poem. Thus we see that many characters must be rejected from the perfect Tragedy, since only those figures in history who represent universal types are to be admitted, for to be true to life, is to be a universal type.

The second term, 'true to type', requires that a character should act and speak in accordance with his sex, age, social station, and environment. As an example, Aristotle says that a woman should not be made valorous, which is a masculine quality. This matter is dealt with but briefly, since it needs no particular explanation. It has, however, much significance for later Italian and French theory.

The third requirement in character is 'consistency', i.e., a character should be 'true to himself', should act throughout





the play in accordance with what he had first been. However, Aristotle recognizes that in real life, there is a type of person who is by nature inconsistent - who says one thing and does the opposite, or who says one thing now, and the opposite five minutes later. This type may be admitted into tragedy, but Aristotle then requires that the character be "consistently inconsistent."(1)

To resume the discussion of Character, we have found that in each requirement, both as to the general qualities of the characters, and as to the specific treatment of them, Aristotle had in mind the basic law of Verisimilitude. It is in obedience to the larger Truth that the characters must be better than ordinary, as only such characters can arouse the sympathetic pity and fear of the listener; and it is only by the amalgamation of the strong qualities of many and some weakness common to many, that a universal figure can be depicted.

### UNITIES

Before we have completed the analysis of the Poetics, in the light of later criticism, it will be necessary to consider the Unities, which became of such consummate importance in the later period. They receive but slight attention in the Poetics, and in fact, are nowhere formulated in the treatise. The 'Unities' as such, do not exist until 1570 when they were first formulated as the inseparable three by Castelvetro.(2)

The only one of the three which is discussed by Aristotle is Unity of Action, which is required as the basic principle of dramatic poetry. This is given place in the definition of Trag-

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1. Poetics XV.

2. Cf. infra, ch. II, p. 43.





edy: (1) "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude," and in chapter VII, this section of the definition is repeated: "Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation of an action, that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude." A 'whole' is further explained as "that which has beginning, middle, and end." In chapter VIII we read, "the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action, and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed." In chapter IX, also, "Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot 'episodic' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence." This last links Unity of Action with the law of necessity and of Poetic Truth. It is because Verisimilitude demands a proper sequence of cause and effect, that Unity of Action finds place in the Aristotelian doctrine. A great part of chapters VII, VIII, and IX is devoted to the details of this principle. Chapter VIII begins: "The unity of action does not consist, as some people think, in the unity of hero. For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity;" and so, too, "there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action." So important is this principle, that it is one of the basic differences between Epic and Tragedy, and must therefore be a primal consideration for the tragic poet.

We have already seen (2) that Time is mentioned more than once in the Poetics. Aristotle's true theory as to the time of

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1. Poetics VI.

2. Cf. Supra, p. 14.





the action is that "the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad."(1) This statement is significant, first as showing the close relation between the Unity of Time and the Unity of Action; and secondly, as showing the very guarded form of Aristotle's own statement. How far are we here from the dogmatic 'rule of twenty-four hours' established and successfully imposed by the Renaissance critics! Aristotle takes particular pains, in the same chapter, to state that, "the limit of length in relation to dramatic competition and sensuous presentment, is no part of artistic theory." At all times, throughout the Poetics, Aristotle remains the artistic critic, whereas we shall find a different point of view in some of the most important Italian theorists. The sole authority adduced by the commentators for their twenty-four hour rule, is the oft-quoted sentence from chapter V: "Tragedy endeavors, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit." It is to be noted however that this comes early in the Poetics, before any discussion has been begun as to Tragedy and its parts. The whole of chapter V is devoted to differentiating between Comedy, Tragedy, and Epic. The limitation of time in Tragedy, common in Greek practice, is given as one of the distinguishing marks between Tragedy and Epic poetry. Furthermore, the text says, "endeavors . . . . to confine itself. . . .", and the matter is in nowise set up as dogma. The word 'endeavors' becomes first 'does' and thence 'must' in the

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1. Poetics VII.





Renaissance theories, wherein lies the greatest misinterpretation of Aristotle in this matter.<sup>(1)</sup> As for Unity of Place, it is nowhere mentioned in the Poetics nor in any way suggested. We shall discover its origins later in our study.

### RESUME

This completes our analysis of the Poetics of Aristotle, as regards Tragedy. Our next chapter will trace briefly its influence on Renaissance criticism. As a last thought, it should be remembered that the key-note to Aristotle's theory is Nature and Reason, in the guise of Verisimilitude. It is due to a lack of comprehension of this principle that most later critics and commentators unknowingly distorted the original sense of the Poetics. From a doctrine which worked towards Universality in Art, was deduced a set of rules which lead to a very particularized form of Art, which was to endure for nearly three centuries.

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1. Cf. infra, ch. II, p. 42





CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF POETIC ARTS

IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE (1)

- 1529 Trissino, G. G.: Poetica, Pts. I-IV
- 1536 Daniello: Poetica
- 1548 Robortelli, F.: In Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica  
Explicationes
- 1550 Maggi, V.: Edition of Aristotle's Poetics
- 1554 Giraldi Cinthio: Discorsi
- 1555 Fracastoro, G.: Naugerius, sive de Poetica Dialogus
- 1559 Minturno: De Poeta
- 1561 Scaliger, J. C.: Poetices Libri Septem
- 1563 Trissino, G. G.: Poetica, Pts. V, VI.
- 1563 Minturno: Arte Poetica
- 1570 Castelvetro: Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta
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- 1611 Heinsius, D.: De Tragediae Constitutione
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(1) Only those works are mentioned to which some reference will be made in the text of the present study.





## Chapter II--Horace and the Italian Critics

Between Aristotle and the Italians, we should make at least brief mention of Horace's Ars Poetica, which, although not a complete or formal treatise on poetry, was held in high esteem during the Renaissance. Differing greatly from the Poetics of Aristotle, its influence was nevertheless as widespread as that of the Greek treatise, and it necessarily gave rise to other interpretations, some of which were in direct opposition to Aristotle's doctrine.

On Plot, Horace follows Aristotle: "You that write, must either follow tradition, or invent such fables as are congruous to themselves." (1) The term 'congruous' denotes the same thing as the Aristotelian 'necessary or probable'. As applied to a subject of the poet's invention, the term means that the plot and the characters should be constructed in accordance with natural principles, and must remain consistent throughout. (2) If the poet treats a subject from accepted legend, he may not change the essentials of the story nor alter the characters.

For the treatment of the characters, Horace gives several examples to guide the future poet: "The manners of every age must be marked by you, and a proper decorum assigned to man's varying dispositions and years." (3) "It will make a wide difference whether

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1. Ars Poetica 1. 119-127: Aut famam sequere aut sibi convenientia finge.

2. Si quid inexpertum scenae committis et audes  
Personam formare novam, servetur ad imum  
Qualis ab incepto processerit et sibi constet.

3. 156, 157: Aetatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores,  
Mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis.





it be Divus that speaks, or a hero; a man well stricken with years, or a hot young fellow in his bloom; and a matron of distinction, or an officious nurse." (1) In these first two essential considerations of dramatic poetry, Horace neither changes, nor adds to, Aristotle.

But in his interpretation of the function of Tragedy, Horace returns to the general Greek doctrine of an ethical function. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Aristotle was quite alone in his aesthetic theory of poetry, so much alone, in fact, that no one fully grasped his conception. Nor did Aristotle succeed in making his thought clear in the Poetics, as was manifestly evidenced by the misinterpretations of the Renaissance critics. Horace, on the other hand, comes out without hesitation: "Poets wish either to benefit or delight," (2) and in one clear forceful line, "He who joined the instructive with the agreeable, carried off every vote." (3) Since later commentators found Aristotle's position so difficult to determine, and the Latin text so extremely simple, it is not remarkable that Horace prevailed in this question, if we remember also that this was the traditional conception. But what was not clear to the Renaissance commentators, was that Horace had departed on this point from Aristotle; they were unconscious of having imposed a foreign theory upon the original Greek Poetics. Aristotle's text did not preclude an eth-

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1. 114ff. Intererit multum divusne loquatur an heros,  
Maturusne senex an adhuc florente juventa  
Fervidus, et matrona petens an sedula nutrix.
  2. Ars Poetica, l. 333: Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae.
  3. Ibid., l. 343: Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci.





ical interpretation, and Horace's precept was taken to be the true meaning of Aristotle's "purgation" of the passions of pity and fear. This was the most important change made in the Aristotelian doctrine, by welding to it the Horatian Ars Poetica.

In the discussion of the Italian critics, no attempt will be made to give an historical account of literary criticism, nor even of tragedy alone, throughout the period of the Italian Renaissance. (1) It is rather our purpose to trace those changes in the theory of tragedy made by the more important critics of the period - changes which prevailed during the seventeenth century, particularly in France. This sketch should bridge the gap between the Poetica and the doctrine of Corneille's immediate predecessors and contemporaries. To cover so long a period in a brief space, makes it necessary to consider only definite topics, as they are handled by the different critics, and not the works of the critics in chronological order, or in any complete form. We shall therefore limit our study to the three parts of dramatic doctrine which were subjected to changes at the hands of Aristotle's commentators: Poetic Imitation or Verisimilitude, the Katharsis, and the Unities, in all of which the Renaissance critics wrought vast changes.

### VERISIMILITUDE

Let us follow first the fortunes of the doctrine of Poetic Imitation or Verisimilitude. The first mention of this comes in Part I of Trissino's Poetica: (2) "Dico adunque che la Poesia (come

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1. For more detailed treatment cf. Spingarn, Joel L.: A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 2nd edition, New York, 1908, pp. 3-167. Also Saintsbury, George: A History of Criticism, New York, 1902, vol. II, pp. 1-235. An excellent presentation of Renaissance criticism in its direct relations to the classical theories of the drama in France is given by Arnaud, Ch., in his volume entitled, Les Théories dramatiques au XVIIe siècle, Paris, 1888, pp. 116-135.
  2. Trissino, G. G. Poetica. Vicenza, 1529.





prima disse Aristotle) è una imitazione de le azioni de l'homo."

(1) This, however, is but a repetition of the Aristotelian phrase. Daniello in 1536, (2) develops at some length the thought that the poet may omit some actual happenings, and add circumstances of his own fancy, so long as they are verisimilar, i. e., have an appearance of truth, and fit in with the other parts of the story. This was to some extent a misunderstanding of Aristotle's true intent as regards Verisimilitude, which was to surpass the realities of Nature, not merely to supplant them. Robortelli, in 1548, (3) comes nearer the original Greek meaning, and grasps the further idea that the inventions of the poet must follow the creative principles of Nature. Fracastoro (4) combines with this theory of the Verisimilar, the Platonic idea of Beauty. It is thus that the ethical conception is introduced, since in Platonism, the beautiful is of necessity connected with the good. The poet, by portraying the beautiful and the good, directs the minds of men towards these ideals, and thus is the great teacher of men. But Fracastoro does not emphasize the ethical aspect of the Platonic system; it is rather the element of ideal beauty which arrests his attention.

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1. I take this opportunity to correct the statement of Prof. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 28: "In the Poetica of Daniello (1536), occurs the first allusion in modern literary criticism to the Aristotelian notion of ideal imitation." While Daniello may have been the first to discuss the idea of Imitation, the credit of the first mention belongs assuredly to Trissino.
  2. Daniello, Bernardino, Poetica, Vicenza, 1536, pp. 41ff.
  3. Robortelli, F: In Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes Florence, 1548, pp. 86 ff.
  4. Fracastoro, G.: Naugerius, sive de Poetica Dialogue, 1555, pp. 340, 357.





To quote Spingarn (1), "It is the chief merit of Fracastoro's Dialogues, that even while emphasizing this Platonic element, he clearly distinguishes and defines the ideal element in aesthetic imitation."

But during the decade following Fracastoro's work, the emphasis was entirely shifted to the rational element in poetry (which soon led to a similar emphasis on the ethical function). Aristotle's meaning of 'transcending Nature' was completely lost, and a new interpretation given to Poetic Truth. This was inevitable, because of the rationalizing tendency of the Age. Scaliger (2), in his discussion of the Unities, requires that the events be so arranged that they approach nearest to actual truth (*ut quam proxime accedant ad veritatem*). Here, then, the aim of the Poet should be to create a semblance of reality, which is to confuse Poetic Truth with the Truth of Fact. The next step was an obvious one: the truth of history is the truth of poetry also. Scaliger maintains that if an action has the sanction of actual though unique occurrence, then it must have the sanction of Verisimilitude. This is the opposite of Aristotle's principle of probable impossibilities, since this is to admit the possible improbabilities. Scaliger was brought to this requirement of historical subjects, because he had required that Tragedy deal with kings and princes. These personages could not be invented, for then they could not be made credible.

1. Op. cit., p. 34.

2. Scaliger, J. C. : Poetices Libri Septem, Lyons, 1561.





Castelvetro followed Scaliger in these misinterpretations, and (1) added another element which was in opposition to Aristotle's doctrine, the "ingegno a trovare". (2) In the final test the Poet's worth is to be determined by the skill he has shown in the invention of unexpected incidents. The best plot is that one in which the Poet exercises the greatest ingeniousness in complicating the situation. It is with regard to the types of recognition possible that Castelvetro says: ". . . artificiali (sono) quelle nel trovamento delle quali egli dura fatica et essercita molto lo 'ngegno, et disartificiali, quelle nel trovamento delle quali egli non adopera molta sottilità d' ingegno, essendo esse atte ad essere vedute da qualunque persona commune". (3) Thus the romanesque, over-complicated plot, which was the direct result of the theory of the 'ingegno a trovare', goes back for its origins to the misinterpretation of Poetic Truth or Verisimilitude. By admitting to Poetry the truth of history, the Renaissance critics lost for poetry that higher truth of universality which Aristotle had demanded. In the following sections on Katharsis and the Unities, we shall find that all the misinterpretations of the Greek Poetics, on these matters, were due to this rationalized Verisimilitude.

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1. Castelvetro, Ludovico: Poetica d' Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta, Vienna, 1570. All references will be to the second edition, Basel, 1576. This work is of particular importance for the study of Corneille's practice and theories.
  2. P. d'A., p. 67.
  3. Ibid., p. 350. This theory becomes the "difficulté vaincue" of Corneille's doctrine, which he exemplifies most perfectly in the romanesque plays of his later manner, particularly Rodogune and Héraclius. Cf. infra, chapters XI and XII.





## KATHARSIS

For Katharsis, also, we shall find in Trissino, Part I, the first mention among the Italian critics. But here we find a wide divergence from Aristotle. It will perhaps be well to quote in full the passage in question:

"Bellissima cosa è fare beneficio a le genti; la quale non solamente tanto piu bella è reputata, quanto, che il beneficio in piu persone si estende, ma quanto anchora con maggior dilettazone, di chi la utilidade riceve, si fa; --- Hora essendo il maggior beneficio, che a le genti humane si possa fare, lo insegnarli a vivere bene;---et essendo poi la maggior parte de lj 'homini di tal natura, che mal volentiere porgono orecchie a lj 'ammaestramenti, e con diletto ascoltano le favole, e le cose lascive; però giudico essere sommamente da laudare quelli antiqui Poeti, i quali considerata la dilettazone, et utilidade commune, hanno con le battalje, e con le favole mescolate tutti i bellissimi ammaestramenti de 'l vivere humano." (1)

Here already we find the Horatian function of Tragedy dominating an otherwise Aristotelian treatment. More important in its influence at this period was Daniello's work, already referred to, which also accepts the Horatian precept of the didactic function. Maggi, in 1550, definitely links Aristotle and Horace on <sup>the</sup> ethical function of poetry, thus completing the fusion of the two doctrines.

In 1559, Minturno, (2) still holding to the ethical interpretation, adds a new element, which was to bear great fruit. Beginning with the simple 'prodesse aut delectare' of Horace, Minturno analyses the means of bringing about profit with delight, and concludes that in addition to the Pity and Fear of the Aristotelian doctrine, Admiratio is a powerful means for attaining the

1. Op. cit. p. II

2. Sebastiano, Antonio, detto Minturno: De Poeta (Venice, 1559)







end of Tragedy, which is purgation. This was a totally new departure, but was taken up by Trissino in his fifth Book, published in 1563(1), and further elaborated by Minturno in his Arte Poetica of 1563 (2). In this later work, the term used is 'meraviglia', which has been substituted for 'admiratio'; this fact will prove of importance in discussing the meaning of the latter term.

It is necessary to determine the exact meaning of 'admiratio' and 'meraviglia' in Minturno's texts, since Corneille later cites Minturno as justification for <sup>at least one</sup> ~~several~~ of his characters. (3) The English term 'Admiration' has been taken from the French 'Admiration', used by Corneille, (4) by which he meant most frequently the admiration of character, as is the modern French and English use. But if we glance at the history of the word, we find that the original Latin meaning was 'wonder' or 'astonishment' which links it closely to 'meraviglia', although the modern meaning of 'admiration' is also given. (5) The 16th Century French kept the original meaning, almost exclusively, (6) but in the 17th Century, the two meanings were constantly confused. All the greatest writers have examples of both meanings, (7) and in Corneille we find striking examples of each. The problem, then, is to determine

1. Cf. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 50. Tutte le Opere, (Verona, 1729), vol. II, p. 99: Trissino requires that the action of tragedy be such "che negli animi nostri muoveno misericordia, e tema; e di queste cotali, quelle fanno maggiore ammirazione, le quali intervengono quasi per disposizione fatale, oltre la aspettazione, per credere de le genti." And later on the same page, "queste tali sono piu belle, perche hanno la ammirazione, con la misericordia et col terrore." In each case, ammirazione is to be translated 'wonder'.
2. 1564 is the date usually given, but the Dedication of the first edition is dated 1563, which is the date given also at the end of the volume. 1564 is the date of its appearance in print.
3. Cf. infra, ch. VIII. 4. Cf. Examen of Polyucte, et passim.
5. Cf. Thesaurus Linguae Latinae 6. Cf. Furetière, Dictionnaire S.V. admirable: "qui est surprenant, merveilleux."
7. Cf. Huguet, Ed: Petit Glossaire des Classiques Français, Paris, 1919, for examples.







whether Minturno used the two terms synonymously, or whether he already was making the shift to the more modern meaning. If the term 'meraviglia' preceded 'admiratio' chronologically, we might conclude that the idea of 'admiration of character', leading to emulation, as an ethical aim for Tragedy, was becoming uppermost in Minturno's thought. But the facts belie this argument, since 'meraviglia' is the term constantly used throughout the Arte Poetica, (1) and it is clear from the text that the meaning is the wonder or astonishment occasioned by the "avvenimento inopinato", which is another expression frequently used. There is no tinge of the modern meaning of admiration. And on the other hand, the term 'ammirazione' nowhere appears in the text. (2)

1. I give here a few citations from the Arte Poetica, Bk. II, which deals entirely with Tragedy. P. 76: "Ma con empito di parole, e con grave peso di sentimento desta nell'animo passione, e inducelo a meraviglia, così spaventando, come a pietà movendo." Again on p. 78, speaking of the material of Tragedy, Minturno says: "persone grandi e illustri; e cose meravigliose, e notabili." P. 79: "perciòche del Traggico poeta l'ufficio è d'inducere l'Auditore a meraviglia. E meraviglioso riputiamo quello accidente, che muove a compassione; overo spaventa." And again, pp. 96, 97: "... come che al Tragico si convenga il procacciar de piacere a' riguardanti con qualche vista, che generi meraviglia, e diletto." In this last quotation, it will be noticed that 'profit' has been omitted for the moment.
2. The form mirabile occurs several times-P. 41: "ne punto si dubita, che le cose mirabili non diletino meravigliosamente..." The meaning here is easily determined by the context: "quelle cose mirabili riputiamo, che non vanamente son finte, ma prudentemente, e mirabilmente trovate, e con ordine degno di meraviglia disposte, e locate, si ben congiunte, come se l'una dell'altra dipendesse." This shows clearly that Minturno is thinking of the 'wonder' or 'marvel' which is to be aroused by the ingenuity of the poet in arranging his incidents. It goes back to the Aristotelian theory, and foreshadows the "ingegno a trovare" of Castelvetro. One more example will suffice to show that there is no shadow of the modern 'admirable' in Minturno's use of the word: p. 43: "E quella riconoscenza è più mirabile, allaquale segue il meraviglioso, e molto dal pensier nostro lontano avvenimento." Here again the two words are in close juxtaposition, which aids our translation of the first: "to be wondered at", or "to be admired" in the same sense as the preceding example.





In the DePoeta of 1559, on the other hand, the word 'admiratio' and various forms of the verb and adjective, occur many times. Let us now examine some of the instances. The point of departure is given in Minturno's form of the definition of Tragedy, where he states that the poet should so write, "ut debeat, ut delectet, ut moveat." (1) Later he says that the duty of the poet is "to lead the hearer to admiration." (2) Taken in conjunction with the previous quotation, it would seem clear that the admiration to be aroused is 'wonder' at the fable or invention of the poet. Such appears certainly to be Minturno's thought, for the following sentence reads, "Admiranda vero esse, quae vel afferunt miserationem, vel terrorem incutiunt, eaq; magis, quae cum consequatur, praeter spem praeterq; opinionem eveniunt." This is identical with the sentence quoted above (3) from Trissino where he uses the term 'ammirazione', which is to be translated 'wonder'. Another instance of the word in a familiar setting strengthens this argument. Minturno says (4), "Quod autem ex hoste accipitur . . . nec ita horrendum existit, nec tam miserabile, ut mirificum prorsus esse videatur." Here there is no doubt of the meaning 'wonderful'. The passage continues with examples of actions that will arouse the required emotion: "Nam admiranda quidem sunt, quae Troianis crudeliter & inhumane a Graecis illata esse perhibentur." And the conclusion comes in the following sentence, "Verum ad ipsum horroris, et haec admiratio non ab hoste, sed ab actione excitatur", where

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1. De Poeta, p. 102.
  2. Ibid. p. 180.
  3. Cf. supra, p. 34, n. 1.
  4. De Poeta, p. 180.





again the meaning is manifestly that of 'wonder', and is applied to actions, not to character.

As further evidence that the word 'admiratio' regularly meant 'wonder' or 'surprise' for Minturno, we have some help from one passage of the dialogue, (1) where Minturno, turning to his interlocutor Cossus, comments that it is natural that a certain thing should cause him great 'wonder', (2) and that he will now explain the matter, in order that he may cease 'wondering'. (3)

This is still further brought out also, in the section devoted to Christ and the perfect character as figures for Tragedy. Minturno would admit Christ as the central figure in a tragedy, since the crucifixion would arouse the deepest pity, and by the resurrection our highest wonder is aroused, at the fact that the power of death was overcome. (4) Nowhere in these pages is there any mention of the admiration for the personality of Christ, thus showing that Minturno's attention is entirely centered on the action, not on character.

1. De Poeta, p. 53.
2. "Sane quidem . . . ita est, ut tibi mirandum videtur".
3. "ut desinas admirari".
- 4; Ibid., pp. 183, 184. It is significant, however, that in the Arte Poetica (p. 76) he says: "In tragedia si reca innanzi agli occhi l'esempio della vita e li costumi espressi di coloro, i quali avanzando gli altri nelle grandezze e nelle dignità e negli agi della Fortuna, sono per umane errore in estrema infelicità caduti." Here he returns to the Aristotelian requirements. At this point, his chief concern was as to the ideal hero of Tragedy, whereas in the passage cited from the De Poeta, the discussion centered around the actions which could best arouse pity and wonder. It is just one example of the inconsistencies of Minturno's theory, which did not attempt to reconcile the different parts of the same doctrine.





In spite of the several critics (1), it seems then a justifiable conclusion, that in Minturno there was no shade of the modern meaning of admiration of character, with the thought of emulation. It is to be noted, however, that Minturno does place Admiration by the side of Pity and Fear, (even omitting Fear at times), as a purpose for Tragedy. By the incorporation of 'ut moveat' in his definition, he definitely added this as a third element. In a broad way, we can say that Minturno adapted to some extent the 'marvelous' of the Epic, to Tragedy, since 'admiretio' is for him only a lesser degree of 'meraviglia'.

After this long digression, in which we have anticipated a difficult problem to which we shall return in a later chapter (2), it should be recalled that, as regards the interpretation of the Aristotelian Katharsis, Minturno is thoroughly Horatian, and never deviates from the position that the function of Tragedy is didactic.

Between Minturno's two treatises comes Scaliger's pedantic work in which a conscious attempt was made to reconcile Aristotle and Horace. Scaliger, more than anyone else, is responsible for the twisting and distorting of Aristotle's brief treatise, and for making of it a handbook of rigorous and inviolable rules. In his dogmatic attempt to combine Aristotle and Horace, we shall not be surprised to find that Scaliger attributes an ethical function to

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1. Cf. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 52; Charlton, N. B.: Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, Manchester, 1913, p. 132; Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 53. The latter does not expressly say that Minturno meant admiration of character, but this apparently is his thought.
  2. Cf. infra, ch. V, p. 96.





Tragedy. Indeed, for him the matter is quite beyond question, and he devotes no discussion to it whatsoever.(1) Scaliger requires the unhappy ending in Tragedy for reasons of symmetry and easy Definition. Comedy is described as dealing with persons of humble station, and has a happy ending; Tragedy, by contrast, presents noble persons, and has an unhappy outcome. Elsewhere, however, Scaliger admits that the unhappy ending is not necessary to Tragedy (2). But as for the rank of characters, Scaliger never withdraws his requirement that Tragedy should treat only illustrious persons.

In 1570, Castelvetro published his Poetica which is a real attempt to "explain" the Aristotelian doctrine. But Castelvetro's point of view and his field of observation were too entirely different from Aristotle's for him to reach anything like the same result. The very size of Castelvetro's volume makes it patent that his analyses are far more thorough-going and carried to a much finer point. On the matter of Katharsis, this is particularly clear. In place of the few words of Aristotle, "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions", Castelvetro devotes between four and five pages to the nature of this pleasure which can come from the spectacle of misfortune. Castelvetro considers that Aristotle had an ethical purgation in mind (3), but that this was introduced only as an answer to Plato, who would banish poets from the Ideal Republic, as being an evil influence. For Castelvetro considers that such a purpose is not in accord with the rest of the Aris-

1. This lack of discussion may be due, as Charlton suggests, to the fact that Scaliger half realized that Aristotle did not mean an ethical purgation, and therefore would not strengthen his (Scaliger's) position in this matter.
2. III, 97.
3. Cf. Charlton, H.B.; op. cit., p. 120.





totelian doctrine. Having rejected the theory of purgation, Castelvetro no longer requires an unhappy ending for Tragedy. But in this connection he makes a point of some importance to our later study, that if the tragedy has not an unhappy ending, it cannot arouse the Aristotelian Pity and Fear. Castelvetro did recognize the inherent relationship of these two factors. Castelvetro's theory is that "Tragedy is fulfilling its function by the mere excitement of pity and fear."(1)

Pleasure is the end of all poetry, and Castelvetro now inquires into the nature of the pleasure which can come from seeing the downfall of a virtuous man. Aristotle, he says, leaves no room for delight, since he considers utility (purgation) as the chief end of Tragedy, although this is contrary to his own principle that the end of all Poetry is pleasure. Castelvetro now finds himself somewhat embarrassed, but the following is his rather complicated answer(2): "The pleasure excited by poetry has two modes, one oblique, one direct.(3) When the good man passes from misery to happiness, we are happy, feeling that he deserved his exaltation. But when the good man falls into misery, we have a feeling of sadness; this sadness, however, is itself a pleasure, because we recognize that it is due to our having an inherent sense of the injustice of the good man's evil fate. The former pleasure, Castelvetro calls 'direct': it is the special end, in one form, of the

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1. Cf. Charlton, H.B. : op. cit., p. 134.

2. Charlton, op. cit., p. 127.

3. P. d'A. 696.





epic, and in another, of comedy. The latter pleasure he calls 'oblique': and this is the proper end of tragedy." Charlton points out that at this point Castelvetro's doctrine is certainly not ethical, but(1) "he ends in a theory moral to the extent of being evangelical. From tragedy we learn not to trust the world; and we learn it in a delightful way, much better than from a sermon or from 'la semplice voce del dottore'." Castelvetro seems here to have adopted a purely didactic function for poetry.

But Castelvetro's method of analysis is too complicated for us to trace it in any detail here, and it is exactly this lack of clearness, just as in the case of Aristotle himself, that led the 17th Century writers to follow Scaliger and Minturno in certain points of their dramatic doctrine. While Castelvetro appears to have grasped the aesthetic import of Aristotle's doctrine, he was not able to express it in terms sufficiently clear for others to follow his train of thought. We shall find that while in most matters Corneille relied upon Castelvetro's interpretation, as regards the function of Tragedy, he follows Scaliger and more particularly Minturno.

Thus we see that beginning with Trissino, who already in 1529, had inserted the Horatian function of Tragedy into the Aristotelian doctrine, all the critics of influence did the same, including Minturno, Scaliger, and Castelvetro. On this point, the true meaning of Aristotle, as it was analysed in Chapter I of this study, was completely lost, long before his Poetics reached France.

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1. Ibid. p. 129.





## UNITIES

The last subject of importance with the Italian critics was the Unities. We have seen the scant mention of them in the Aristotelian text, and we must now trace their development as a dramatic doctrine. The theory of the three Unities as a dramatic principle was first formulated in Italy. But any historical treatment of the Unities must consider each of the three separately, for the doctrine of the three Unities was not established as such until 1570 in Castelvetro's Poetica. Unity of Time was the first to receive the attention of the critics. The first known mention of the Unity of Time is in the Discorse of Giraldi Cinthio, which was written before 1550, although not published until 1554. In listing the similarities between Tragedy and Comedy, Cinthio says "et l' una et l' altra finge l' avvenimento della sua attione nello spatio di un giorno, overo di poco più...."(1) Spingarn comments on this passage: "he (Cinthio) has thus for the first time converted Aristotle's statement of an historical fact into a dramatic law."(2) Maggi, in 1550, goes still farther. Spingarn says of him, "Maggi attempts to explain logically the reason for the Unity of Time."(3) He (Maggi) argues that "if we should see the actions of a whole month performed in about the time it takes to perform the play, that is, two or three hours, the performance would be absolutely incredible." Spingarn sums up Maggi's viewpoint: "The duration of the action of the drama itself must fairly coincide with the duration of its representation on the stage."

Scaliger, in 1561, followed this same rationalizing ten-

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1. Discorsi, 205.

2. Op. cit., p. 91.

3. Ibid. p. 93.





dency, and made of Aristotle's comment a rigid, dogmatic precept for the future dramatic poet. It is in the name of Verisimilitude that Scaliger would identify the time of the action with that of the representation.(1) Scaliger amplifies the example given by Maggi; and argues that since the whole play is represented in six or eight hours, it is not in accordance with the exact appearance of truth(*haud verisimile est*), that within that time a tempest should arise and a shipwreck occur, out of sight of land.(2) Both Maggi and Scaliger have the rationalistic attitude towards the Unity of Time, which has its basis in a misinterpretation of the Aristotelian Verisimilitude. In their effort to make Aristotle conform to their own rational conception of the Universe, the Renaissance critics substituted Reality for Poetic Truth. Trissino and Minturno, in their treatises of 1563, return to the original Greek phrase, merely making a general comment on Time.

It is not until 1570 that we have the definite formulation of the Unities. Castelvetro in his Poetica discusses the Unities at great length, and it is from him that they were introduced into France. Before studying Castelvetro, it is well that we should accept the warning of Breitinger,(3) even though it is somewhat overstated.: "Castelvetro s'était plus attaché à combattre, de parti pris et systématiquement, la poétique d'Aristote qu'à l'expliquer." The standpoint of the two is different. Whereas Aristotle maintains that the power of Tragedy is felt even apart from representation and actors(4), Castelvetro begins with the

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1. Scaliger requires that the events be so arranged "ut quam proxime accedant ad veritatem."

2. III, 96.

3. Breitinger, Heinrich: 2nd edition, Geneva, 1895: Les Unités d'Aristote avant le Cid de Corneille.

4. Poetica VI.



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actual performance, and lays stress on the dramaturgic side. (1) The reason for this changed attitude is that Castelvetro was writing from the point of view of the Italian stage conditions as they then existed. The very restricted stage of the Italians was in contrast with the open Greek stage. This difference made it necessary for the critic to concern himself first of all with actual stage business and, in terms of the unities, this means the Unity of Place. It then becomes readily intelligible why Castelvetro reverses the order of the Unities, assigning the first position to Place, second to Time, and the third to Unity of Action, which he considers merely as an aid to the observation of the Unities of Time and Place. (2) While Castelvetro considers that

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1. Castelvetro, P. d'A., p. 298: "... (la vista) essendoui necessaria, se la tragedia dee hauere la sua perfettione, la quale ella ha quando è recitata in atto con la vista conuenevole". Cf. also ibid., p. 297: "Aristotele..... e di questa opinione, che quello diletto si tragga della tragedia in leggendola, che si fa in vedendola, & in udendola recitare in atto; la qual cosa io reputo falsa", and also ibid., p. 687: "... non è vero, che la tragedia operi quello, che è suo proprio, per la lettura senza la vista."
  2. Spingarn, op. cit., pp. 99, 100. Also Charlton, op. cit., p. 89 and note. Castelvetro, p. 179: "Ma egli (Aristotle) si poteva bene auedere, che nella tragedia, e nella comedia la favola contiene una attione sola, o due, le quali per dipendenza possono essere reputate una, e piu testo d'una persona, che d'una gente, non perche la favola non sia atta a contenere piu attioni, ma perche lo spatio del tempo al piu di dodici hore, nel quale si rappresenta l'attione, e la strettezza del luogo, nel quale si rappresenta l'attione, non permettono moltitudine d'attioni, o pure attione d'una gente anzi bene spesso, non permettono tutta una attione intera, se l'attione è alquanto lunga. E questa è la ragione principale e necessaria perche la favola della tragedia, e della comedia dee essere una, cio è contenere una attione sola d'una persona, o due stimate una per la dipendenza."





Aristotle had intended twelve hours as the time allotted to Tragedy, he wishes that the time of the action should coincide if possible with the time of the representation. At least, under no circumstances is it to exceed twelve hours, due to the physical necessities of eating, drinking, and sleeping experienced by the spectators. (1) Here we have the extreme rationalistic interpretation. As for the Unity of Place, Castelvetro wishes that it be limited to that space which a person can see at one time, (2) This too is a rational interpretation, which would limit the action to adjoining rooms, or rooms opening on a garden or public square. When followed too strictly, the scene of the action would be reduced to a single room. All action which took place outside that room would have to be narrated.

We have found in our analysis of Aristotle's Poetics, that the fundamental law of Tragedy was Verisimilitude or Poetic Truth. We have now shown that this conception was overthrown by the Renaissance critics, whose rationalizing ten-

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1. Poetica, p. 57: "La rappresentativa spende tante hore in rappresentare le cose, quante si spendono in farle." Also, Poetica, p. 109: "Così come il luogo stretto è il palco, così il tempo stretto è quello che i veditori possono a suo agio dimorare sedendo in theatro, il quale io non veggo che possa passare il giro del sole, sì come dice Aristotele, cioè è, hore dodice, conciosia cosa che per le necessitate del corpo, come è mangiare, bere, diporre i superflui pesi del ventre o della vesica, dormire e per altro necessita non possa il popolo continuare oltre il prefetto termine così fatta dimora in theatro."
  2. Poetica, p. 535: "Nella tragedia lo spatio del luogo, per lo quale essa si mena a fine, è ristretto non solamente ad una città o villa o campagna o simile sito, ma anchora a quelle viste che sola può apparere agli occhi d'una persona" The 'eye' idea had already been expressed by Aristotle, but not carried to such limits. Cf. Poetics, VII.





dency substituted for it, the actual truth of fact. This basic change necessarily affected both the choice of subjects for Tragedy, and their treatment. We have already said that it was in the name of Verisimilitude that Scaliger led the way to the Unities, and through a rationalized verisimilitude, Castelvetro limited the time of the action to that of the representation, and the place to that of the stage itself. The whole doctrine of the Unities was founded on rational grounds, with respect to Actual, not Poetic Truth. This is also the basis of the ethical interpretation of Katharsis, since the moral function of poetry seemed to the Renaissance critics a rational purpose for Tragedy, as opposed to the mere pleasure-giving purpose we now accept.

In other words, as regards the fundamental nature and purpose of Tragedy, and its manner of presentation, the Italian critics completely overruled Aristotle's Poetics, and when the doctrine reached France, it was known only in this pseudo-Aristotelian form.

Alongside of the Italian critics, there was one other Renaissance critic who was of great importance in the formulation of the French theories in the early seventeenth century. This was the Dutch scholar, Daniel Heinsius, whose critical theories are to be found in his De Tragediarum Constitutione, published at Leyden, 1611. (1) This work made no

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1. Heinsius received the praise of Scudéry, of the newly-formed Academy, and of La Mesnardière. Cf. Arnaud, Ch., op. cit., p. 134.





pretense at being a commentary on Aristotle, but was, like Scaliger's work before it, and D'Aubignac's which followed it nearly half a century later, an original body of critical theories. Yet the work of Heinsius was in the main merely a repetition of Aristotle's doctrine, and he sets forth only a limited number of original ideas. But these were to be of the utmost importance for Corneille's later theories, for they fitted in perfectly with Corneille's temperament. Along among Renaissance critics, Heinsius believes that the rules of art are not infallible, and that the poet should not be subjected too completely to the grammarians and philosophers. Is it surprising that Corneille should seek in such a critic a defense against some of his adversaries? (1)

Another novelty of Heinsius was his interpretation of the moral requirements of tragedy. Here he was less original, for he maintained still that tragedy should be didactic in function, but he would require only that the majority of the characters have the high moral stamp: "Plures sint bene morati". (2) It was in view of this moralizing features of his doctrines, that Heinsius<sup>was</sup> accepted with Sc-

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1. We cannot know when Corneille first became familiar with the work of Heinsius, but he knew of him at the time of the Quarrel of the Cid, for Boudery had cited Heinsius (Ch. 6 of the De Tragediarum Constitutione) in his accusations against Corneille. It is not until the Discours that Corneille makes definite mention of Heinsius. We shall speak again of him in our chapter on the Discours and Examens.

2. Quoted from Arnaud, Ch., op. cit., p. 135.





liger by the early French critics. The work of Heinsius was easier to read than the enormous and pedantic work of Scaliger, and we may conjecture also, easier to obtain, because of its later appearance.

Among the Renaissance critics whom we shall find cited by Corneille, when he, in turn, comes to formulating his own theories, Heinsius, Castelvetro, and Minturno hold first place. We have already seen in this chapter wherein the doctrines of each would suit the character of Corneille's tragedies. This will be pointed out repeatedly in the following studies of the tragedies themselves, and the influence of the Renaissance critics on Corneille's dramatic theories will be seen particularly in our final chapter on the Discours and Examens.





### CHAPTER III - FRENCH DRAMATIC THEORY BEFORE CORNEILLE

When we turn to the study of the dramatic theories in France during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we must not lose sight of the fact that there existed two distinct schools during this period, sharply divided in doctrine and chronology. (1) Even before the general influx of the Italian rules, made popular by the more important works discussed in our last chapter, there were tragic poets in France who made an attempt at regularity. (2) But with the appearance of Scaliger's and Castelvetro's commentaries, a new impetus was given to the movement, and in 1572 Jean de la Taille first formulated the Unities of Time and Place in France. (3) Throughout the sixteenth century, there had been frequent mentions of the unities (4), which were to assume a superstitious importance in France, even greater than they had received in Castelvetro's doctrine.

But this school of tragedy was nearly eclipsed by the monumental production of Hardy, who was, in more than one sense, the Shakespeare of France. Yet we must not let it appear that Hardy broke suddenly with his predecessors. In

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1. Faguet, E: En Lisant Corneille, Paris, 1913, p. 49: "Avant Corneille il y a eu en France deux écoles tragiques, celle du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, celle de 1600 à 1630."
  2. Cf. Jodelle, Grevin, Garnier.
  3. Art de la Tragédie, "il faut toujours représenter l'histoire, ou le jeu en un mesme iour, en un mesme temps, et en un mesme lieu." (Quoted by Lancaster, H.C. P.M.L.A. XXII, 1908, p. 310)
  4. Cf. Pelletier, Poétique (1555): Grevin, Brief Discours sur le Théâtre (1561): Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, L'Art Poétique (1575-1605): Ronsard, first Preface to the Franciade (1572): le sieur d'Aigalliers, whose Poétique of 1598 argues against the Unities. For this period, cf. Arnaud, Ch., Les Théories dramatiques au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Paris 1868, pp. 116 ff.





his first plays, Hardy was completely subservient, writing choruses, in the manner of Montchrestien and Garnier, using dreams, prophecies, and long monologues. It was Hardy's natural dramatic sense which led him to bring real action into his tragedies, and this was his greatest reform. Through Hardy, the French stage lost the lyrical elements which it had had during the sixteenth century, and became essentially dramatic. Hardy retained all the devices of his predecessors, although making of them mere ornaments, and no longer the basis of his tragedies. He did more; he passed on this sixteenth century tradition to Mairet and to Corneille.(1) Hardy's reforms, however, went too far, and resulted in extremely complicated and romanesque plots: murders, suicides, and violence of all types formed the usual 'dénouements' to Hardy's plays. It is in this direction that Corneille's greatness lies, for he evolved from this romanesque type of play the internal, psychological drama, which was to develop into the great classic French tragedy.

Hardy could not have produced the psychological tragedy of the later period, for he had not found the 'cadre' which was necessary for psychological action (2). This 'cadre' was to be furnished by the 'règles' of the critics, and chief among the 'règles' were the Unities. While his dramatic sense

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1. Cf. Médée which has all the ear-marks of the Sixteenth century tragedies. Cf. infra, Ch. IV, —.
  2. Hardy's tragedies do not all lack psychology, for in La Mort de Daire and especially in La Mort d'Alexandre, there is much psychological development, but this is still overshadowed by excessive external action in the background. Corneille's Médée, and indeed the Cid as well, both suffer from this tradition, from which Corneille does not free himself until Horace.





provided Hardy with a Unity of Action that was in general completely classic, he did not observe the Unities of Time and Place. It is in this sense that his plays are 'irregular', and are compared to the repertory of Shakespeare. The 'règles' (by which is understood chiefly the Unities), were generally disregarded, not only by Hardy, but by all poets for thirty or forty years (1), covering roughly the period from 1590 to 1625 or 1630. Hardy, by the effervescent and spirited action of his plays, so attracted the public, that they willingly set aside the more scholastic 'regular' plays of the sixteenth century school. As Arnaud expresses it, "Ni Jodelle, ni la Taille, ni Garnier lui-même ne nous avaient donné assez de plaisir, ne nous avaient inspiré assez de fierté pour fixer nos goûts: nous acceptâmes de nouveaux maîtres et de nouveaux modèles dès qu'ils se présentèrent. Aux Italiens succédèrent les Espagnols et à la Poétique régulière de Trissino celle de Lope de Vega." (2) It is essentially a romanesque period, in which all restraining theories are laid aside. Dominated by the personal genius of Hardy, the movement which led to the great vogue of tragi-comedy came to a real decline. At his death in 1630 (3), Hardy's influence had already waned (4), and a new school was begun, represented by the Silvanire of Mairet in 1630 (5). It was this school which prepared the way for the classic tragedy, by a return to the Italian models. It was directly the work of this pre-classic group which prepared

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1. Cf. Petit de Julleville, Le Théâtre en France Paris, 1889, p. 92. 2. op. cit., pp. 132, 133. 3. This date is not certain, but is given as probable by Rigol, in his Alexandre Hardy, Paris, 1889, p. 37. 4. Cf. Lombard, L. Zeit.f. frz. Sp. u. Litt., 1, 170, who considers that Hardy may have withdrawn from play-writing as early as 1623. 5. For discussion of this date, cf. infra, p. 56, n. 1.





the Quarrel of the Cid in 1637, and the resulting triumph of the classic or 'regular' tragedy.

Therefore, we shall not concern ourselves with the history of French tragedy in the sixteenth century, since it was of no influence upon the doctrine in which we are interested.(1) And the system of Hardy and his followers need not be treated here, since its production is quite apart from the true French tendencies. Let us then begin our investigation just at the moment when Hardy was losing favor, and when the dramatists began again to study the Italian doctrines.

It is extremely difficult to determine at just what point this change took place, but all sources show that the first consideration for the new theorists was the Unities, as it had been for the Italians themselves. This pseudo-Aristotelian theory becomes the clue and pivotal point of 'regular' play-writing, and to say that a play was in the rules, between the years 1629 and 1643, might mean merely that it observed the Unities. An historical sketch of the Unities in France will then give us the approximate date of the introduction of the Italian rules into France.

Until very recently, Zanneisser's study of the Unities in France, (2) was our most accurate source of information. Here the idea  
 1. Cf. Lancaster, H. Carrington, P.M.L.A. XXII (1908), p. 311, "They (the theories of the 16th Century) influence only the academic tragedies of the 16th Century, a type of play that ceases to be written during the first quarter of the following century, giving way before the practical and irregular drama of Hardy and his contemporaries. When Frenchmen are again attracted to classic playwriting, they turn for their rules to the Italians..., rather than to the plays and theories of their 16th century compatriots." 2. "Zur Geschichte der Einheiten in Frankreich", Zeit. f. fr. Sp. u. Litt., vol. 14 (1892) pp. 1 - 76.





had been brought forward that Isnard, in his preface (1) to the Fillis de Scire (2), had been the first French writer to refer to the Unities in the 17th century. But Professor Lancaster (3) has discovered an interesting passage in "LaGénéreuse Allemande", a play of Le Sieur Mareschal, who was a versatile playwright contemporary with Rotrou and Corneille. Mareschal declares himself against the Unities in almost polemic fashion. This passage is from the Preface to the second 'journée' of the play, which preceded the first by some two months. The date of the 'achevé d'imprimer' for the second 'journée' is Nov. 18, 1631. The preface itself must then have been written previous to November, 1630, thus preceding the preface of Isnard by from five to eight months. Since this discussion by Mareschal (4) is against the Unities, we can fairly

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1. Published April 30, 1631.

2. A posthumous play by Pichou.

3. Op. cit., pp. 307 - 315.

4. The passage in question reads as follows: "... n'ay pas voulu me restraindre à ces estroites bornes ni du lieu ni du temps, ni de l'action; qui sont les trois poincts principaux que regardent les règles des Anciens. Qu'ils me soutiennent que le sujet de Théâtre doit estre un en l'action, c'est à dire estre simple en son événement, et ne recevoir d'incidents qui ne tendent tous à un seul effect d'une personne seule; ie leur declareray que le mien en a deux diuerses. Qu'ils soutiennent encore que la Scène ne connoist qu'un lieu, et que pour faire quelque rapport du spectacle aux spectateurs que ne remuent point, elle n'en peut sortir qu'en mesme temps elle ne sorte aussi de la raison; i'auou'ray que la mienne de commencement et pendant les deux premiers Actes est en la Ville de Prague, et presque tout le reste en celle d'Aule, en un mot qu'elle passe de Bohême en Sylésie. De plus qu'ils jurent qu'un sujet, pour estre iuste ne doit contenir d'actions qui s'étendent au delà d'un iour, et qui ne puisse auoir esté faites entre deux Soleils; ie ne suis pas pour cela prest à croire que celles que i'ay décrites, et qui sont véritables, pour auoir franchy ces limites ayent plus mauvaise grâce."





assume that there had been already some advocacy of them before this time, to arouse so bitter an opponent. And indeed there had been scattered discussions by Chapelain and others, but these centered mostly around the unity of time.(1) But Mareschal stands as "the first French author of the seventeenth century known to mention the unity of place, and the first to speak of the unity of action as belonging essentially to the drama rather than applying to all poetic forms." "Of greater importance is the fact that he is the first French author known to group these Unities of Action, Time and Place so as to point them out as the three essential rules of the classic theater." (2)

Without entering into a discussion of the details of its formulation, Breitinger (3) simply states: "On sait assez aujourd'hui que cette théorie. (des unités) s'est formulée entre 1629 et 1636 sous l'inspiration de Chapelain et par les ordres du cardinal-poète." The first of these dates, 1629, is that formerly accepted for the Silvanire of Mairet(4), in which he

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1. Lancaster, op. cit., p. 312: "Before Mareshal, indeed, the writings concerned with dramatic unities were largely devoted to the unity of time, which, taken from Aristotle, as interpreted by Renaissance scholars had been familiar to Italian critics of the sixteenth century."
  2. Ibid. p. 312.
  3. Breitinger, H. : Les Unités d'Aristote avant le Cid de Corneille, 2nd edition, Geneva, 1895!
  4. Cf. infra, p. 56<sup>m1</sup>. where we have corrected this in accordance with Dannheisser's evidence.





very intentionally observes the Unities (1); and the latter, that of the Cid, which brings the discussion to a head.

Let us review now the significant events of this formative period (2). Emile Faguet says in one place (3), "Soudain, vers 1625, une insurrection des lettres contre le romantisme de 1620 .....se produit." The leader of the insurrection was undoubtedly Chapelain, for as early as 1620, he had made mention of the unity of action (4); in 1623 he wrote the Préface de l'Adone; and in 1630, his real manifesto appeared in the form of a letter to Godeau, which was circulated (5). In 1635 he converted Richelieu to the new doctrine (6). Once the iron-handed cardinal had turned his interest to the new rules, their triumph was certain. But no mere theories evolved by critics could change the whole practice of the stage, without the added efforts of the playwrights themselves.

The dramatist who put the new doctrine on the stage was Jean

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1. Lanson, Gustave, Hist. de la Litt. 12th ed., 1912, p. 420. "Celui qui les (les unités) introduisit réellement fut Mairet.. Il les appliqua...à peu près..dans Silvanire, tragi-comédie pastorale (1629). En 1631, il formula la théorie classique des unités dans la Préface de Silvanire. Enfin, en 1634, il fit jouer Sophonisbe, la première tragédie régulière qu'on ait donnée."
  2. Cf. Arnaud, op. cit., pp. 136ff., for complete discussion of the development.
  3. Op. cit., p. 51.
  4. Cf. Lancaster, P.M.L.A. (1908), pp. 311, 312.
  5. Cf. Collas, George: Jean Chapelain, Paris, 1912, pp. 96ff.
  6. Ibid., pp. 117-119. cf. also Lanson, Hist. de la Litt Fr. (12th edition), Paris, 1912, p. 420.





de Mairret, with his Silvanire, in 1630 (1). Mairret was the spokesman of the new school, of which Chapelain was, so to speak, the administrator. With the success of Silvanire and Sophonisbe, and the authority of Chapelain, who was Richelieu's right-hand man in literary matters, everything favored the success of the "règles".

There is still another phase of the subject to be considered in this chapter. We have said that the tragedies of the 16th century were discontinued, supplanted by the enormous production of Hardy, who wrote for the most part tragi-comedies. Contemporary with the later plays of Hardy, were the tragi-comedies of DuRyer, Schelandre, and Mairret himself.(2) The most casual study of the period makes it at once apparent that the predominant genre was tragi-comedy. To quote Professor Lancaster (3): "Between the years 1600 and 1628, the romanesque type of tragi-comedy not only became the predominant form of the genre, but was raised by Hardy and his contemporaries to the position of

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1. The changes in Mairret's dates made by Dannheisser in the Romanische Forschungen, vol. V, (1890), pp. 37-60, have long been accepted as definite. But Danneheisser was too timid to hold out for 1630 as against 1629 for Silvanire, although his evidence seems entirely in favor of the later date. If we accept 1630 as the date for Silvanire, it is necessary to change the generally accepted date, 1629, for Mélite, to 1630. This Dannheisser was not willing to do, but the more recent study of Professor H. C. Lancaster, "Probable Dates of Corneille's Early Plays", Mod. Lang. Notes, 1915, pp. 1-5, adds further evidence in justification of this change. We shall then accept the date 1630 for both Silvanire and Mélite, and 1634 for Sophonisbe.
  2. For the detailed treatment of the tragi-comedy, cf. Lancaster, H. C., French Tragi-Comedy Baltimore, 1907. (Johns Hopkins Dissertation.)
  3. Ibid., p. 101.





the most popular and extensively written form of dramatic production in France." Mairet's Sophonisbe and Corneille's Médée, both of 1634-1635, were the first returns to regular tragedy.(1) The former owes its importance to the fact that it fully applied for the first time, the new dramatic rules; the second of these plays owes its slight place in history to the single fact that it was the first attempt at tragedy made by Corneille. The Cid itself was first classed as a tragi-comedy, because of its happy ending, and Horace stands out as the first great tragedy in the classical manner. After 1640 'regular' tragedies followed in close succession; even Rotrou and DuRoyer who had devoted themselves to tragi-comedy, now turn to tragedy. Why this brusque return to a neglected, almost forgotten, genre?

We must analyze to some extent the favor in which tragi-comedy was held at this time. The decade 1620 - 1630 saw the rise of Richelieu, who stunned the kingdom by his iron-handed methods, his almost superhuman efforts in behalf of the monarchy. It is in part due to the figure of Richelieu himself, that the French public became interested in great exploits. But stronger than this, was the influence of the "grands romans": the Astrée, that combination of pastoral and romanesque elements, held the

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1. Theophile's Pyrame et Thisbé, first printed in 1623, may rather be classed as a pastoral, than as a tragedy in the classic sense. Rotrou's Hercule Mourant, dates from the early part of 1634, but it is irregular.





reading public spell-bound. The tragi-comedy was merely the dramatization, one might say, of the grands romans, presenting the same materials on the stage.

Alongside of these popular plays, enacted at the Hotel de Bourgogne, some of sixteenth century type, the traditional tragedies of the sixteenth century type were continued, within the closed society of student groups.<sup>(1)</sup> There were even, scattered here and there, tragedies given publicly. So that the break between the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries, emphasized by Hardy's productions, was not by any means complete; some of the old tradition sifted through. Yet it still remains true that the great incursion of tragedy on the French stage beginning with Mairat, Scudery, Rotrou, DuRoyer, and Corneille, was not a reawakening of the older school. Nor was it a sudden break from tragi-comedy. It was rather the logical evolution of the latter, hastened by the importation of the Italian dramatic rules. As we shall see in a later chapter, the Cid was the combination of the romanesque, offered by the Spanish subject, and the restraint imposed by the Italian theories. It was quite in line with contemporary tendencies, but was marked by the superior personal genius of Corneille.

It was not only a natural evolution, but an actual necessity, that the tragi-comedy should give way to tragedy, with

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1. Cf. Lanson, "Les Origines de la Tragédie Classique en France", R.H.L., vol. 10 (1903), pp. 178-231; 413-436.





the coming of the Italian rules. For the requirement of the Unities, particularly of Time and Place, made it impossible to represent an action in which "la scène se passe tour à tour dans toutes les régions de l'univers". (1) The new rules outlawed the multiplex scenery (2) (which however continued in practice until after the Cid at least); proscribed plays which required several days for their performance and several years for their action; and above all, ruled out the 'invraisemblances' of the tragi-comedy. In the words of Lanson, (3) "il fallait trouver un drame capable d'avoir toute son ampleur dans les cadres étroits de quelques heures et d'une chambre." (4)

By 1630, the Unities had become of paramount importance, and all else was determined by them. Even Verisimilitude, which had been the prime consideration of Aristotle, has become the slave of the Unities, a subordination which had already been begun by Scaliger. (5) And of the three Unities themselves, that of Action has been reduced to third place and is made dependent upon the other two. At the time when Corneille first makes acquaintance with the rules, the "règle des vingt-quatre heures" is supreme.

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1. Lanson, Corneille, p. 33.

2. For a full presentation of this system, cf. Le Mémoire de Mahelot, Laurent, et d'Autres décorateurs de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne et de la Comédie-Française au XVIIe siècle. (ed. by H.C. Lancaster) Paris, 1920. pp. 33-40.

3. Corneille, p. 39.

4. For a more complete treatment of the transition from tragi-comedy to tragedy, see the whole of Chapter II in Lanson's Corneille.

5. Cf. supra, p. 43 .





CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF CORNEILLE'S EARLY COMEDIES AND TRAGEDIES  
TO THE YEAR 1652.(1)

1630	<u>Mélite (2)</u>
1631	<u>Clitandre</u>
1631-1632	<u>La Veuve</u>
1632	<u>La Galerie du Palais</u>
1633	<u>La Suivante</u>
1633-1634	<u>La Place Royale</u>
1634-1635	<u>Médée</u>
1636	<u>L'Illusion Comique</u>
1636-1637	<u>Le Cid (3)</u>
1640	<u>Horace</u>
1640	<u>Cinna</u>
1641-1642	<u>Polyeucte</u>
1642-1643	<u>Pompeé</u>
1644-1645	<u>Rodogune</u>
1645	<u>Théodore</u>
1647	<u>Héraclius</u>
1650	<u>Don Sanche d'Aragon</u>
1650-1651	<u>Nicomède</u>
1651-1652	<u>Pertharite</u>

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1. Le Menteur and Andromède have been omitted, as they will not be included in the following chapters.
  2. Cf. Dannheisser, E., Romanische Forschungen, V (1890); also Lancaster, H.C., (1915). For all the plays prior to the Cid, the dates established by Lancaster have been accepted.
  3. For all plays from the Cid through Pertharite, the dates given by Lanson in his esquisse have been accepted. In the case of Pertharite, Lancaster prefers 1651 to 1652 which is the date given by Lanson.





#### CHAPTER IV - CORNEILLE'S EARLY PLAYS

Turning now to Corneille, let us see how he interprets in his early practice, the various questions of Poetic doctrine. Before the Cid, our only documents are the comedies, and the one tragedy, Médée, together with the Epitres and Préfaces, which preceded these plays. For our purpose, the comedies afford little help, except as regards the Unities, and the general application of Verisimilitude. It will be well to follow the chronological order in this section so that we may have as clearly in mind as possible the development of the dramatic theories, as they actually grew upon Corneille himself.

The Examen de Clitandre gives us an excellent starting-point, in its well-known opening statement: "Un voyage que je fis à Paris pour voir le succès de Mélite m'apprit qu'elle n'étoit pas dans les vingt et quatre heures: c'étoit l'unique règle que l'on connut en ce temps-là." Thus the Unities became at once the chief pre-occupation for Corneille; they were to remain so during the greater part of his dramatic activity. In Mélite, no effort had been made at Unity of Time, and the action extends over several weeks. As for the Unities of Action and Place, Corneille attributes his handling of them to his own merit: "le sens commun, qui étoit toute ma règle, m'avoit fait trouver l'unité d'action pour brouiller quatre amants par un seul intrigue, et m'avoit donné assez d'aversion de cet horrible dérèglement qui mettoit Paris, Rome et Constantinople





sur le même théâtre, pour réduire le mien dans une seule ville." (1)

These remarks concerning the Unity of Place have reference to the multiplex scenery of the French stage, a remnant from the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages, where Paris, Rome and Jerusalem were all represented on the stage simultaneously. For this purpose a system of mansiones was devised and by the use of signs placed over each doorway, the audience knew where the scene was according to the door through which the character appeared or disappeared. (2) The inconvenience of this arrangement became very evident when the stage, no longer allowed the freedom of all outdoors, as had been the case when the plays were given in front of the churches, was now limited to the small stage of the Theatre du Marais, or the Hotel de Bourgogne. But since this statement of Corneille is taken from the Examen, we may feel assured that it is not entirely exact, but is tinged with some of the theories which he learned at a much later period, and we may be permitted to doubt somewhat whether Corneille determined his Unity of Place by any comparison with contemporary practice. However that may be, the important point for us is to note that the action in Mélie does transpire within one city, which was an acceptable interpretation of the Unity of Place, at the time.

The Unity of Action is weak, since the principal action is completed at the close of the fourth act, and the fifth is devoted to the conclusion of an episode. Corneille himself recognized this

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1. Examen de Mélie.

2. Cf. Matzke, J.E. "The Unity of Place in the Cid," M.L.N., 1898, pp. 393-409.





fault in the Examen, but no blame was attached to it in 1629, for it passed unnoticed. We have seen how, from the time of Castelvetro, the Unity of Action has gradually lost its predominant position, and provided there is a 'principal action', the critics, as well as the public, were entirely satisfied.

The following year, in Clitandre(1), Corneille followed the rules, particularly that of "les vingt-quatre heures." Here, then, we have the first conscious effort, on the part of Corneille, to restrain any natural tendencies. Nor are we to be hoodwinked by Corneille's later statement that it was a mere bravado (2), to show that he could follow the rules if he chose, for there is evidence that in 1631 he considered the play more worthy than Méliste.(3)

Here the rule of twenty-four hours was fulfilled, since this was one of the two purposes Corneille set himself in writing the play. (4) The Unity of Place is still very indefinite. In the Préface we read, "je laisse le lieu de ma scène au choix du lecteur;" and later, "ma scène est donc en un château de roi, proche d'une forêt." Both the château and the adjacent forest were necessary to the action, but this was quite acceptable in 1630, for the critics permitted an interpretation of the Unity of Place which should include places so far distant that it required twenty-four hours to go between them. As for the Unity of Action, it is less satisfactory, even, than in Méliste, from our point of view, for there is such a wealth of episode that one can scarcely distinguish the principal

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1. The title of "Tragédie" was not given to this play until 1660; it was first called "Tragi-comédie". Cf. I, p. 258 Marty-Laveaux.
  2. Examen of Clitandre.
  3. Cf. Marty-Laveaux I, 258.
  4. The second was to have multiplicity of episode, in answer to an objection made to Méliste. Cf. infra. pp. 63, 64.





action from the several secondary ones. Again, the fifth act is weak, and the marriage of Clitandre comes as a surprise. Yet the play succeeded, and the public accepted the over-romanesque plot with eagerness. We are still in the period whose taste had been formed by Hardy and Théophile. For us, Clitandre is very valuable as an indication of the state of dramatic theory at the time; we perceive thereby that the Unity of Place was still variable, and Unity of Action was not of much concern either to critics or playwrights.

Next in order comes LaVeuve, in 1631, or 1632. Unity of Time is here disregarded, or at least interpreted in a very new fashion. Corneille allotted five days to the action, just as there are five acts to the play. Corneille explains in the preface Au Lecteur of 1634, that of six plays written by him up to that time (1634), three had been restricted to twenty-four hours, and he had allowed himself entire freedom in the other three. One is startled to read next, "Pour l'unité de lieu et d'action, ce sont deux règles que j'observe inviolablement....", but the sentence continues, "mais j'interprète la dernière à ma mode; et la première, tantôt je la resserre à la seule grandeur du théâtre, et tantôt je l'étends jusqu'à toute une ville, comme en cette pièce." This dates from the early weeks of 1634, and shows clearly Corneille's preoccupation with the Unities. No other point of doctrine has been treated in the prefaces.

La Galerie du Palais, which appeared also in 1632, adds little of interest for us. Unity of Time is handled in the same manner as





in the preceding comedy, with five consecutive days for the action. Nor is the Unity of Place exact, since the action begins in the Galerie du Palais, then moves to a street showing several houses, reverts a second time to the Galerie du Palais, and in the last act, the street setting is used again. The Galerie du Palais has real Unity of Action, which was doubtless aided by the more restricted Unity of Place.

The next play, La Suivante, is of considerably more importance, because of the Epître which precedes the first edition. However, the date of this Epître is 1637, just at the moment when the Cid was before the Academy for critical examination. We should therefore leave the consideration of this document until we come to the discussion of the Quarrel of the Cid. La Suivante gives the closest adherence to the Unities we have met up to this time, and actually applies Castelvetro's extreme rationalistic ideas as to time and place. That this was intentional on the part of our author is not to be doubted, for he later tells us that he has not since held himself so closely to the rules.

La Place Royale was played in 1633, or at least prior to March 13, 1634, although it was not published until 1637, like the two preceding comedies. Corneille wrote no Preface or Epître to this play except the dedication, which does not deal with any questions of doctrine. Unity of Action is bad in this play, for there are two separate intrigues planned, of which the second is not the necessary result of the first. This is the first time we have had occasion to criticize the Unity of Action, except for ex-





cess of episodes. Corneille later recognized this duplicity of action in the Examen. Unity of Time is maintained. The Unity of Place is that of a public square, but Corneille encroached upon strict unity at one point, to permit the heroine to lament and reflect in her private apartments. The 'invraisemblance' of such a scene in a public square was too patent to Corneille, and he preferred to "rompre l'unité de lieu".

Next in order of time comes Médée, Corneille's first tragedy, but first we may discuss L'Illusion Comique (1), the last of the comedies (2). L'Illusion preceded the Cid by only a few months, which serves to make more surprising the tremendous gap between the two works in every point except that of time. Yet, as Marty-Laveaux points out (3), L'Illusion has a Spanish subject, and its hero speaks at times in language quite befitting Rodrigue. But in the comedy, Corneille gave free rein to the romanesque subject, and disregarded all rules or doctrine. The Unity of Action is much impaired by the fantastic fifth act, in which the characters of the comedy take part in a tragedy. In the Examen, Corneille treats separately the first four acts, which constitute a comedy, and the fifth act, which is an undersized tragedy. Unity of Action is totally foreign to such a production. There is, however, strict Unity of Time, and a certain Unity of Place, since the characters remain in the same general place throughout the five acts. This comedy-tragedy may truly be styled an extravaganza, and quite apart from our study.

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1. This was the title used until 1660. 2. We shall not treat Le menteur nor La suite du menteur since they are quite aside from the current of the tragedies. 3. II, pp. 423 ff.





Before turning to Médée, let us resume our discussion of the Unities in the early comedies, and add a paragraph on the handling of Verisimilitude. We have seen that the Unity of Action was weak in practically all, with the possible exceptions of La Galerie du Palais and La Suivante. The Unity of Time is followed in the strict interpretation of twenty-four hours in three of the comedies (Clitandre, La Suivante, La Place Royale), but is disregarded in the other four. The Unity of Place is variously handled, and we find different localities in the same town (Mélite, La Veuve, La Galerie du Palais), buildings around an open square (La Place Royale), places that can be reached in twenty-four hours (Clitandre), and a single locality (La Suivante, L'Illusion Comique).<sup>(1)</sup> Unity of Time was his greatest concern, as it was for the theorists of the period. Unity of Place was still undetermined, in theory as well as in practice. This was largely due to the persistence of the system of multiplex scenery, which made it possible to have several localities on the stage at one time. It is not until the time of Horace that this disappears, from Corneille's plays for it is still used in the Cid.

Verisimilitude as a poetic requirement does not appear in these early prefaces, yet, while it is scarcely fair to seek the same poetic verisimilitude in comedies that we should require of Tragedy, an examination of these early plays will give us some indications as to Corneille's conception of this basic principle in

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1. Cf. Matzke, J. E.: "The Unity of Place in the Cid", M.L.N., XIII (1898), p. 396.





all dramatic writing. Following as he did the generation of Hardy, at a time when tragi-comedy was at its height, and the theater-going public required the romanesque in fable and invention, the new poet naturally followed the popular trend. In fact, Mélite was censured for its "peu d'effets", a fault which Corneille promptly remedied in Clitandre, where the plot is so complicated that it requires six pages for the poet himself to present the "argument". That so many and ~~se~~ such unexpected actions should happen as if by mere coincidence, is not probable, in the Aristotelian sense. The fact is that Corneille was still following Hardy, Théophile, and the others, without any regard for Verisimilitude.

Thus in the first seven plays, (still excepting Médée), Corneille's dramatic doctrine considered only the Unities; in this respect he was following the contemporary practice. And in their treatment, he considered them in the reversed order which Castelvetro first set up, holding Time of prime importance, Place second, and Action as the slightest of the three. Already we are far afield from Aristotle, whom Corneille probably did not know as yet through any study of his own. It is significant that Horace and Scaliger are both mentioned in these early prefaces, quite as prominently as Aristotle himself.(1) It is clear also that Corneille made much progress in his acquaintance with the dramatic rules between 1629, at which time he tells us he knew not of their existence (2), and 1636.

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1. Epître à la Suivante. This, however, dates from 1637.
  2. Examen de Mélite.





Already in the Préface to Clitandre, of 1632, he cites, though inaccurately, Herace. We must believe that his theoretic knowledge was at this time mostly hearsay, which he gathered in his conversations with Chapelain, Richelieu, and their "poètes à gages", the "cinq auteurs".

In Médée, which preceded the Cid by a little less than two years, we have the first of Corneille's tragedies. The question immediately presents itself: why should Corneille have turned to tragedy, and why should he have chosen the story of Medea? A possible answer has been suggested by Professor Searles, who thinks that Médée may have been a 'pièce de commande'. This theory is based on the fact that Corneille was at this time selling his comedies, and more particularly because within the year 1634-1635 the troupe of Mondory presented three tragedies: la Sophonisbe of Mairot (1), Médée of Corneille, and La Mort de César of Scudéry. May it not very well be that Mondory himself suggested subjects to three of the leading playwrights of the day (2), or at least, that each should furnish a tragedy for his repertory? It is known from a letter of Balzac to Boisrobert (3) that Mondory himself played the leading roles in the three tragedies. Such an hypothesis seems indeed plausible. While Professor Lancaster does not accept this theory in full he would agree that the return to tragedy was stimulated by Rotrou's Hercule Mariant, which occasioned a revival of interest in Seneca. Mondory may have wished to have a Senecan play to

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1. The date 1629 given by Marty-Laveaux, II, 331, should be corrected in accordance with Dannheisser's dates. Cf. supra, ch. III, p. 56, n. 1.
  2. Rotrou had given his Hercule Mariant at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and he would not be available as a playwright for Mondory's rival troupe.
  3. Passage quoted in Marty-Laveaux, II, 330.





rival that of the Hotel de Bourgogne. While all this is mere conjecture, yet the fact that Médée stands alone, quite aside from Corneille's practice up to this time, and that it is not followed immediately by other tragedies of the same general type, tend to make one believe that it was some external force which brought forth this first effort.

The play is Senecan and shows evidence of being patterned on contemporary models. The tragic element consists in the atrocity of the actions themselves, not in the unhappy outcome of a struggle between two noble passions, as in the later tragedies. Yet there are some elements in which it definitely foreshadows Corneille's later manner. Médée resembles Cléopâtre in Rodogune: both are superhuman women, unsubservient to Fate. Like the later plays, Médée is essentially Cornelian in its 'invraisemblances' which are the inevitable result of the romanesque elements of the plot and its treatment.

From the point of view of dramatic theories, Médée is of great importance. There is much more to hold our attention here than the mere treatment of the Unities. First of all, we must concern ourselves with the subject-matter. Médée is not the only instance in Corneille's tragedies where wickedness is the dominant trait: Pompée and Rodogune are of the same type. In our earlier chapter on Aristotle, we accepted Butcher's interpretation that such subjects, in which the chief protagonists are morally bad, were to be rejected from the perfect tragedy; but since no definite censure was passed





on Euripides for having portrayed the story of Medea, we decided that the subject was acceptable in a second-rate tragedy. (1) While the subject might indeed receive the sanction of Aristotle, Médée would still not be Aristotelian under any circumstances, for the sorceress remains triumphant throughout. While the 'dénouement' cannot be called truly tragic-comic because of the death of the children of Medea, and the anguish of Jason, it is not thoroughly tragic, since Medea never suffers nor falls into adversity.

As regards the plot itself, it is our great good fortune to possess Aristotle's own verdict. For in the Poetics, the Medea theme is mentioned in the classification of the various types of tragic plots. Aristotle places an action of this type, where a crime is committed with full knowledge of the victims, as third among the four possible types. At least he does not discard it entirely.

But there is one respect in which this plot errs against Aristotelian precept, and for which Euripides is called to task in the Poetics (2), namely, that the 'dénouement' is brought about by a Deus ex Machina. Now the requirement that a well-known plot must not be changed in its main outlines, would have prevented Corneille from ending his tragedy otherwise than he did, but to have been Aristotelian, he should have devised some other means of escape for the sorceress. This plot is, for these two reasons, only a second or third-rate type, in Aristotle's classification.

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1. Cf. supra, ch. I, pp. 19, 20.

2. Ch. XV.





The character of Medea, as protagonist for a tragedy, is a subject for some comment also. Aristotle, we have seen, required that the character be not wholly good, but more good than bad. We analysed the term 'good' to mean something quite apart from moral goodness, and considered it to refer to an aesthetic superiority. It is to be noted that Aristotle never comments on the Medea of Euripides, from any moral point of view. Corneille maintains in his Epître (1) to Médée: "...dans la poésie, il ne faut pas considérer si les mœurs sont vertueuses, mais si elles sont pareilles à celles de la personne qu'elle introduit. Aussi nous décrit-elle indifféremment les bonnes et les mauvaises actions...." This is good Aristotelian doctrine, and brings in the fundamental principle of 'Vraisemblance'.

It is not on the grounds of wickedness that Aristotle would bar Medea from the perfect tragic drama, but because she lacks that human frailty which is to arouse the pity and fear of the spectators. If we take the following lines from the first Act ( II. 319ff.), we have the character of Medea:

Nérine:	Dans un si grand revers que vous reste-t-il?	
Médée:		Moi:
	Moi, dis-je, et c'est assez.	
Nérine:		Quoi! vous seule, Madame?
Médée:	Oui, tu vois en moi seule et le fer et la flamme, Et la terre, et la mer, et l'enfer, et les cieux, Et le sceptre des rois, et la foudre des Dieux.	

She is all-powerful, over Gods and men and Fate. Such she remains throughout the tragedy, never wavering from her purpose of revenge.

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1. Written in 1639.





In Act III, sc. 3, we see her defying Jason:

Ce corps n'enferme pas une âme si commune;  
Je n'ai jamais souffert qu'elle<sup>(1)</sup> me fît la loi,  
Et toujours ma fortune a dépendu de moi.

In Act V, sc. 2, we witness the mental struggle between the abandoned wife and the mother, over the project of slaying her children. Each objection offered by the mother's nature is promptly overthrown by a stronger argument from the jealous wife, and the final decision is reached (l. 1356):

Je vous perds, mes enfants; mais Jason vous perdra. Medea is very certainly not the perfect protagonist of tragedy, in Aristotelian terms.

Our conclusion is then, that Aristotle would not have suggested the Medea story as the subject of a perfect tragedy, under any circumstances; nor would he, on the other hand, have denied it the rank of a third-rate tragedy. The plot is marred by the Deus ex Machina, and the character of Medea has neither the required virtue, nor the human frailty, so necessary to produce the proper tragic effect of arousing Pity and Fear. While there is an unhappy outcome for the tragedy, yet it is to be noted that Medea herself triumphs, without ever a moment's weakening. She is not an Aristotelian heroine.

As to the Unities, that of Time is rigidly adhered to, and is definitely mentioned at various points in the course of the play. The closing lines of Act II read:

Et l'on verra, peut-etre avant le jour fini,  
Ma passion vengée, et votre orgueil puni.

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1. La fortune.





Act III has a definite mention of Time in the very first speech (II. 695, 696):

Avant que le soleil ait fait encore un tour,  
Ta perte inévitable achève ton amour.

In act IV (1), plans are made for the morrow, before which, however, the tragedy is ended. The last reference to time comes in the next to the last scene of the play(2):

Enfin je n'ai pas mal employé la journée  
Que la bonté du Roi, de grâce, m'a donnée.

This is the most striking of all the passages, and it almost seems that the poet is commending himself for his successful handling of the troublesome 'règle des vingt et quatre heures'.

The Unity of Place is dealt with much more freely, and the scene changes twice from the open-air setting of the beginning. (3) Corneille has Medea prepare her poisons in "la grotte magique"(4), in deference to Verisimilitude, and he presents Aegée in prison.(5) A very general type of unity was established by putting at the head of the play "La scene est à Corinthe". It will be remembered that the critics were satisfied if the action took place within the confines of one city.

The Unity of Action in the play is perfect, for all the episodes tend to the principal plot: the revenge of Medea.

Médée, as has been suggested above, is far more akin to the romanesque tragedy which Corneille develops much later, than it is to the Cid, Horace or Cinna. The particular trait which links this

1. Sc. 5, II. 1250, 1251.

2. Act V, sc. 6, II. 1573, 1574.

3. In both Euripides and Seneca, the scene was placed in a public square. 4. Act IV, sc. 1. 5. Act IV, sc. 4,5.





first tragedy to the later period, is the 'invraisemblance' of character and plot. In the Epître to Médée, Corneille expresses a creed to which he always holds: "Je n'examine point si elles (the actions) sont vraisemblables ou non: cette difficulté, qui est la plus délicate de la poésie, et peut-être la moins entendue, demanderoit un discours trop long pour une épître: il me suffit qu'elles sont autorisées ou par la vérité de l'histoire, ou par l'opinion commune des anciens."





## CHAPTER V - LE CID AND "THE QUARREL OF THE CID"

After two sporadic plays, Médée and L'Illusion Comique, neither of which was in the natural trend of Corneille's development, we come to the Cid -- a tragi-comedy, it will be noted, and quite in line with contemporary tendencies. Corneille had familiarized himself with his Spanish sources, particularly the Mocedades del Cid of Guillen<sup>de</sup>\* Castro, even before the appearance of L'Illusion Comique. In this extravaganza Corneille may be said to have tried his hand, before constructing the Cid itself, for the character of the Capitan Matamore in L'Illusion is at times a close second to Rodrigue. Yet this comparison has undoubtedly been over-emphasized, for Rodrigue is essentially different from the type of 'miles gloriosus' which was represented by the Capitan Matamore. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Corneille allowed full play to his romanesque tendencies in L'Illusion, whereas in the Cid, he shows the greatest concern for the rules -- with what felicity, we shall determine later.

Before beginning our study of the Cid, it will be well to recall the circumstances of its appearance. Concerning the date of the first representation there is some doubt as to whether it was at the close of the year 1636 or in the early weeks of 1637. (1) Chief among our sources of information is a letter of Chapelain, dated Jan-  
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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux. III, 8.





uary 22, 1637 (1), in which he says that the Cid has been entertaining Paris, "depuis quinze jours". Taken literally, this would put the presentation in the early part of 1637, but even were one to give a freer translation to the "quinze jours", it could not possibly be put back farther than the very end of December, 1636.

We know that the play was first acted at the Théâtre du Marais (2) and that it was a complete success. Important among the evidences of this favor, is the fact that it was played three times at the Louvre and twice at the 'hôtel' of the Cardinal. (3) Pellisson, in the Histoire de l'Académie (4) relates the event as follows: "On ne pouvoit se lasser de la (5) voir: on n'entendoit autre chose dans les compagnies, chacun en savoit quelque partie par coeur, on la (6) faisoit apprendre aux enfants, et en plusieurs endroits de la France, il étoit passé en proverbe de dire: Cela est beau comme le Cid". Nor was this favor limited to France alone, for the whole of Europe concerned itself with the new play, and it was translated into many languages, including Spanish whence the idea had first come to Corneille. (7) Such, then, were the happy auspices under which the Cid appeared. It entirely overshadowed the other plays of the season, and took the public, both "la cour et la ville", quite by storm.

The discussion of the Cid is one of the most important chap-

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1. Cited in Marty-Laveaux, III, II.
  2. Marty-Laveaux III, 9; also: Petit de Julleville, Théâtre Choisi de Corneille, 9th ed. p. 35, Paris, 1913.
  3. Petit de Julleville, Théâtre Choisi, p. 35. 4. Paris, 1653, pp. 186, 187. Passage quoted by Marty-Laveaux, III, II. 5. La Pièce du Cid. 6. La pièce du Cid. 7. Cf. Marty-Laveaux III, 4ff.





ters in our study, for this play is the first step in the long transition from Hardy to Racine, -- from the romanesque, external action of the tragi-comedy, to the psychological, inner action of the perfectly developed classical tragedy. In this connection it is important to note that the Cid was first actually called 'tragi-comédie', and it was only in 1644 that it was given the name of 'tragédie'.(1) This change in classification indicates well the double character of this play, which retained from Corneille's earlier manner the romanesque action with episodes and episodic characters (the Infanta and even Don Sanche), and the happy ending. Not all of these elements were due to the historical nature of the subject, for Corneille was catering to a considerable degree to the tastes of his day. Coming between the Astree of d'Urfé and the 'grands romans' of Mlle de Scudéry and La Calprenède, Corneille followed the popular favor in his Cid. The novel as a 'genre' is distinct from the drama by reason of its very length, which permits a far broader development of the characters presented; it permits also more colorful, more 'pictorial' backgrounds. Corneille also found these same qualities in his Spanish model, which had many elements of the epic. It was Corneille's greatest merit that in his adaption of this material, he made of it a plot in which the psychological interest dominated. It was due to the dominance of the psychological interest that the Cid finally received the title of 'tragedy'.

But this internal drama is still surrounded by a novelistic, if no longer epic, background. It is not until Horace and Polyeucte

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, 105.





that Corneille evolves a purely psychological drama. And even at the height of his power, Corneille does not attain to the perfection of Racine: this difference is fundamental in the character of the two men, for while Corneille was an ardent admirer of the Human Will, of which his plays are the apotheosis, Racine was a <sup>n</sup>Jansenist, for whom "le moi est haïssable".

After this general presentation of the importance of the Cid, let us now analyze the elements of the play, and trace its development in detail. Whereas in our first chapter, we followed in our discussion of topics the order: Verisimilitude, Katharsis, Plot, Character, and Unities, as indicative of their importance and casual connection in the Poetics, we shall adopt a new order in the following treatments of Corneille's tragedies. In the case of the Poetics, we were accepting Aristotle's own statement of his doctrines, and merely summarizing them anew. In working from the tragedies themselves, rather than from a statement of doctrine, we must analyze first the nature of the plot and characters before we can decide the type of Katharsis produced. Since the Unities were based on the Renaissance conception of Poetic Truth, it is only after treating all these topics that we can ascertain the place given to Verisimilitude by Corneille, and his understanding of this fundamental basis of Tragedy. We shall then treat the following topics in order: Plot, Character, Katharsis, Unities, and Verisimilitude.

## PLOT

If we refer back to our chapter on Aristotle's Poetics we shall find that by 'Plot' was meant the arrangement of the incidents,





or in other words, the invention of the poet as regards the actions to be depicted. In this, Corneille displayed the greatest genius, for his play, although based on that of Guilhen de Castro, is utterly different from the Spanish original in everything but the kernel: the love of Chimène and Rodrigue, which is hindered by the murder of Chimène's father. The Spanish prototype is a national drama, with much local color. It knew no restraining Unities, but portrayed in generous proportions all the scenes of Don Rodrigo's increasing prowess. The play comprised three 'journées', and the time of the action was about three years(1). The whole was spectacular and colorful, and bordered on the epic romance in its general outline. Corneille made of this a French classic tragedy (for the Cid was early recognized to be essentially tragic), that is, he universalized the national element, omitted the many irrelevant scenes of the prototype, and by reducing the external action, made of the play a psychological conflict in the minds of the protagonists. We shall trace the details of this adaptation under the special headings, as they occur in this study.

In Corneille's plot, there are the following external actions: the soufflet; the fatal duel between Don Rodrigue and the count; the battle with the Moors; the duel with Don Sanche. This represented the utmost concentration of the subject. We could not allow space here for the briefest outline of the Spanish play, so encumbered is it with episodes and incidents.(2) Yet, despite this conscious com-

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux III, pp. 207 ff. for analysis of Las Mocedades del Cid. Corneille utilized only the first 'journée' of the Spanish play, but this covered about one year's time. 2. Cf. Segall, J.B.: Corneille and the Spanish Drama, pp. 34ff. for detailed outline of Las Mocedades and comparison with the Cid.





pression, Corneille's plot is over-burdened, because instead of a year's time, he was allowed but twenty-four hours. The 'in-vraisemblances' due to the Unity of Time will be discussed in the section of Unities, when we shall find that it was because of the excess of incident that Corneille could not be quite just to the rule of twenty-four hours.

The play emanates from the fatal soufflet(1), and it is because of this that Rodrigue is bound to take vengeance on the father of Chimène; as the result of the outcome of this duel, in turn, Chimène must seek the death of Rodrigue; it is indirectly due to the nocturnal visit of the Moors that Rodrigue becomes so highly esteemed, and it is because of this victory that the king pardons him, and so on through the play. It is, then, because of the actions which have transpired in the play, that the 'dénouement' is reached.

But if we examine the Cid a little closer, we must realize that neither of the duels, nor the battle with the Moors is represented on the stage. What is actually represented, is psychological action. If we ask ourselves, with Rigal (2), "Quel est le sujet en somme?", we must answer, "L'amour de Rodrigue et de Chimène en lutte avec l'obligation cruelle où ils sont" -- an action which is thoroughly psychological. Rigal further points out (3) that in the great effort to reduce the Spanish original to the rules, Corneille was forced to leave out all the external action

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1. Act I. sc. 3, l. 226.

2. De Jodelle à Molière. Paris, 1911, p. 214.

3. Ibid., pp. 218, 219.





represented in his model. He continues, "le théâtre vit d'action, soit; mais d'abord agir n'est pas s'agiter, et ensuite on vit aussi bien moralement que physiquement; c'est agir que de penser, agir que de détester ou d'aimer, agir que de vouloir. Et le spectateur s'intéressera aux personnages de la pièce s'ils agissent de cette manière, à la condition que le poète saura rendre dans ses vers leurs pensées, leurs passions et leurs volontés, à la condition qu'il saura faire vivre et faire voir en quelque façon des âmes."

Here it is that we come in contact with Racine, the past-master in the depiction of psychological action. We are forced to institute a comparison between the Cid of Corneille and Racine's masterpieces. Does Corneille here portray characters (since psychological action is the portrayal of character in action), in the manner of Racine? No. There is a fundamental difference between Corneille and Racine: Corneille's natural inclination was towards the romanesque -- the extraordinary in character and situation. Racine, on the other hand, chose plots simple both in material and in action, with a situation of frequent occurrence. These he developed psychologically, and the result was a closely knit and unified whole, unimpaired by external elements. Now when the pressure of critics is brought to bear upon two such natures, the effect is quite different in the two cases. It does not disturb the natural habits of Racine, but it works havoc with Corneille. To link 'vraisemblance', with all it implies, to his romanesque, is an im-

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possible feat. The two remain necessarily distinct, since the essential nature of the romanesque is its feature of 'invraisemblance'. But Corneille attempted the impossible, and the inevitable result was that his plays have a double action, inner and outer, psychological and romanesque, tragic and tragic-comic.

Whereas Racine chose his subjects with a view to their poetic variety, that is, their universality, Corneille chose his from the opposite point of view, which Rigal describes for us: "Corneille aime les sujets extraordinaires, et, pour tout dire, invraisemblables; aussi les cherche-t-il patiemment dans l'histoire, et quand il les a trouvés, répond-il victorieusement aux difficiles qui répugnent à les admettre: mon action est historique et n'a point besoin de vraisemblance, parce qu'elle a l'appui de la vérité". (1) To the romanesque theme found by such means, Corneille then adds psychology. He seeks to make the romanesque psychologically true; but the standard of his psychology is the Neo-Platonic ideal of the parfait amant. As Professor Nitze states (2), "the poet's characters react, not to their attachment to an individual, but to the more or less perfection of which they believe that individual capable. Chimène loves Rodrigue, not for himself, but because of his heroism, and to be worthy of his heroism she herself must be heroic:

Tu n'as fait le devoir que d'un homme de bien;  
Mais aussi, le faisant, tu m'as appris le mien.

(11. 910, 911)

The struggle in the Cid is not single, it is double: a struggle on

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1. De Jodelle à Molière, p. 181.
  2. Mod. Phil. XV (1917), 132.





the one hand in the characters themselves between love and duty, and on the other a struggle to make the two ideals agree". In the Cid, the characters are true to a Neo-Platonic ideal, since both Rodrigue and Chimène live up to the demands placed upon them by duty and do not yield to love until after each has made himself worthy of the other. But this Neo-Platonic psychology is not what we mean by psychologically true, in common parlance. We refer to the Aristotelian 'vraisemblance', which, as applied to characters, means the quality of being 'true to life'. Thus, while Corneille's characters may be true to a Neo-Platonic ideal, they are not true to life; those of Racine are; and we have seen the reason for this basic difference.

But in the Cid, as we have seen, there is a double action, inner and outer, psychological and external. Nothing in the Poetics would justify this, but in Castelvetro's rather involved analysis we found the presentation of the two types of action. In basing a play upon psychological action, Corneille is following the Italian critic rather than Aristotle. Yet we are not free to say that he is acting contrary to Aristotle; for while he makes psychological action the basis of the play, it is the action resulting from the psychology, and not the psychology itself which is portrayed to us. We should rather say that Castelvetro, and Corneille in turn, transcend Aristotle. That is to say, they extend the field, but still in the same direction, and without admitting anything which is contrary to the dictates of Aristotle.

To turn now to the details of the Plot, we find that the Cid is built on the complex plan, which was recommended by Aristotle.





There is a first reversal of fortune in Act I (1), occasioned by the 'soufflet', referred to several times in the course of the play. It is anticipated in line 50:

Et dans ce grand bonheur je crains un grand revers.

and is echoed again in lines 452 ff:

J'aimois, j'étois aimée, et nos pères d'accord;  
Et je vous en contoïs la première nouvelle,  
Au malheureux moment que naissoit leur querelle,  
Dont le récit fatal, sitôt qu'on vous l'a fait,  
D'une si douce attente a ruiné l'effet.

Later in the play there are two more reversals of fortune: in Act II, sc. 7, the death of the count increases the bad fortune already announced by the fatal 'soufflet'; and in Act V, sc. 1, Rodrigue's victory over the Moors, which is the beginning of the good fortune which continues throughout the rest of the play. All the actions are the necessary or the probable results of what had preceded, except the Moor theme which is not inherent in the main plot. It is historical however, and, also, it enhances greatly Rodrigue's prowess, which gives it a closely psychological connection with the plot. However, the final 'dénouement' is not Aristotelian, since Aristotle requires an unhappy ending for Tragedy.(2) The happy ending for the Cid was historical and Corneille felt bound to retain the 'dénouement' as it was in the legend. To have made this an Aristotelian play, Rodrigue should have killed himself in despair, or Chimène should have killed him, but this was not historical. The happy ending is one of the remnants of tragi-comedy in the Cid.

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1. Sc. 3, l. 226.
2. Poetics, XIII.





and was the only natural ending for a play of this novelistic type. We have seen that Castelvetro did admit the happy ending for Tragedy, with one reserve, that it would make the Aristotelian Katharsis impossible. We shall find later in this discussion of the Cid, that this theory is borne out.

Accordingly, even having granted that the psychological material of the subject would have been admitted by Aristotle, the plot could never have been admitted, since the poet could neither falsify the received legend, nor end a tragedy happily. It is on this basis that Scudéry later argued that "le sujet ne vaut rien du tout"(1), in which condemnation he is thoroughly justified, since he was judging the play on a purely Aristotelian basis. The fact is that the play suffers from its dual nature: it is psychologically a tragedy, for Love is sacrificed three times, in spite of the fact that Chimène never sacrifices her love for Rodrigue(1). The natural development of the plot would have resulted in the final sacrifice of Love to Duty. But the historical, novelistic background made of the plot a tragi-comedy, with a happy ending. This makes it clear why Corneille was first obliged to call the play a tragi-comedy.(2) Because of its complicated plot, its double action, and its happy ending, the Cid was basically un-Aristotelian.

### CHARACTERS

Let us now test the characters of the Cid, beginning with Rodrigue. It is interesting to see first of all what Corneille says

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1. Cf. final test when Chimène entreats Rodrigue not to allow himself to be killed in the duel with Don Sanche (Act V, sc. 1)
2. Gasté, Armand: La Querelle du Cid. Paris, 1898, p. 75: "Cet événement estoit bon pour l'Historien, mais il ne valoit rien pour le Poète."





himself about his characters. In the Avertissement du Cid (1), he says that the play has the two "maîtresses conditions", one of which concerned itself with the plot, and the second is that "celui qui souffre et est persecute ne soit ni tout mechant ni tout vertueux, mais un homme <sup>plus vertueux que méchant, qui, par quelque trait</sup> ~~foiblesse~~ humaine qui ne soit pas un crime, tombe dans un malheur qu'il <sup>ne</sup> ~~merite~~ pas". (2) On the surface, this sounds like good reasoning, but to one who knows the text of Aristotle, it is evidently a distortion. Aristotle does not say that the ideal tragic hero is the victim of some human frailty, but of some frailty within his own nature. Rodrigue does not suffer as the result of any frailty in his own nature, but because of the human frailty of jealousy in his father Don Diègue. Rodrigue can certainly not be called "a man like ourselves", for he wins the duel with the Count, the battle against the Moors, and a second duel with Don Sanche without so much as a single hour's rest between victories. This crowding of the time element has the effect of making Rodrigue more than ever a superman figure. He never yields to his love, although he does appear to weaken for a moment in his lyric monologue. Like the knight of old, he marches straight forward in the path of duty, without a backward look. It would be an insult to feel pity or fear for such a hero. He lacks the frailty which would render him sympathetic, and cannot arouse the Aristotelian pity and fear. In this connection we can quote line 1057:

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1. Marty-Laveaux, III, p. 86.

2. Op. cit., p. 86.





Mais d'un si brave coeur éloigne ces foiblesses."

Corneille will not admit a single weakness in his hero. In Rodrigue we see the type of super-man, which is so frequent in the later plays of Corneille.

Chimène likewise is superhuman in her steadfastness of purpose, and her relentless pursuit of vengeance against the man she loves. She shows no human frailty, unless her love for Rodrigue, even after the murder of her father, might be considered a frailty. But rather than a frailty, it is her strength. The power of her love is such that she can hold it aloft, unspoiled and unharmed until the tide of vengeance is past. Through the whole action, one feels that Chimène's love stands triumphant, only waiting for a fitting moment in which to declare itself. Chimène is absolute mistress of herself and her situation and cannot call forth our pity or fear. We are confident that she will free herself from the labyrinth of conflicting love and duty and come out victorious in the end. In saying this, we have said that our heroine, like our hero, is un-Aristotelian in the first quality necessary to a tragic figure.

We shall now further test the character of Rodrigue as to the three specific qualities required of the ideal tragic hero, that he be semblable, convenable, and égal. (1)

We have already seen that the first of these terms requires that the poet paint the character as history or public opinion por-

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1. These are the conventional terms in French, for what we have translated as 'true to life', 'true to type' and 'true to self'.  
Cf. supra, p. 20.





trays it. We have further specified that the term means 'true to life'. It is on this score again that the story of the Cid could never be Aristotelian. It is not 'vraisemblable', i.e., 'probable', for this tragedy to end happily, although the subject is historical. But we are anticipating our conclusion before the facts have been proven. Let us examine Rodrigue. Is he semblable? Is he true to history and at the same time true to life? I quote here from Lemaître (1): "On serait assez mal aujourd'hui de mettre à la scène le vrai Cid, c'est-à-dire un chef de bande féroce et pillard". But these are the details which, had they been portrayed, would have robbed the character of its universality. Assuredly, Rodrigue is semblable. He is the great national hero of Spain, a glorious chieftain, with the eternal courage of a great soldier.

Is Chimène true to life? Here we meet with a somewhat more perplexing character. The great situation where the law of probability is most evident, is in the 'denouement': is it semblable that Chimène should marry her father's murderer? Scudery (2) says emphatically NO, and uses this as a firm handle in his denouncement of the play. We must indeed agree, most especially when we reflect that, from the beginning to the end, the time of the play is only twenty-four hours. How shall we explain this improbable character? In the first place it is historical, and to this extent, semblable. As we have seen, the Spanish original of Guilhen de Castro covered about a year's time, and we can realize that a certain giving-in and breaking-down of barriers on the part of the heroine might easily

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1. Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote, Paris, 1886, p. 27.

2. Quoted in Gaste, A.: La Querelle du Cid, Paris, 1898, pp. 75 ff.





take place. Now when Corneille took over the story, he had to change it to a great extent, due to the famous and unavoidable Unities. To contain his subject in twenty-four hours, (and this was the most rigid of the dramatic rules), Corneille had to resort to an improbable possibility, which, it will be remembered, is condemned by Aristotle. But Corneille has managed to deceive his audience as to time at the very end of the play, or at least he breaks away from the one-day plan and gives a year before the real end of the play. Compare verse 1821.

"Prends un an, si tu veux, pour essayer tes larmes." (1)

This was the best arrangement he could find to tell his story within the rules. It is at this point that we realize the complete un-Aristotelian nature of this play. The basic difficulty lay, not with the dramatic method of Corneille, but with the subject he had chosen. Chimène is not a universal type; she is not true to life. In spite of the fact, and indeed, because of the fact, that Corneille painted Chimène true to history, being a romanesque figure, she could not be true to life in the Aristotelian sense.

Our second term was true to type, and we must now examine our characters for this quality. Returning to Rodrigue, do we find him always doing the things a youthful, high-spirited Spanish nobleman should do? To one familiar with the rigid Spanish honor code it becomes immediately apparent that Rodrigue had his duty marked out for him very definitely. For a Spanish hidalgo who had lost his Honor, everything, including Love and even Life itself, had to be sacrificed

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1. Cf. infra p. 97 for full discussion of the Unities.





to redeem the lost Honor. It is Rodrigue's bounden duty to avenge his father and he does it; it is right for him to offer his life to Chimène, since the obligations of Love are second only to Honor, and Rodrigue places his life at her feet over and over again. At the end of the play, he goes off satisfied and happy in the pursuit of new honors and distinctions. There is no point at which the reader stops with a jerk, surprised at some action of Don Rodrigue.

How about Chimène? She is a noblewoman, in love with Rodrigue, forced by Honor to seek vengeance on her lover. Does she ever act in a manner unbefitting her station? In this connection we must recall that Aristotle had said expressly that a woman must not be represented as valorous. Now is it not undue valor on the part of Chimène to pursue Rodrigue so insistently and unceasingly? Is it probable that a sweetheart would refuse every possible means of placation, and reconciliation, even though backed by the king and the people? The Infanta says, Act IV, sc. 2, ll. 1183 ff.:

Quoi! pour venger un père est-il jamais permis  
De livrer sa patrie aux mains des ennemis?  
Contre nous ta poursuite est-elle légitime,  
Et pour être punis avons-nous part au crime?  
Ce n'est pas qu'après tout tu doives épouser  
Celui qu'un père mort t'obligeoit d'accuser:  
Je te voudrois moi-même en arracher l'envie;  
Ote-lui ton amour, mais laisse-nous sa vie.

We must then recognize that Chimène is highly valorous, a super-woman, and in this quality, is not true to type, according to Aristotelian requirements. (1) And we may say here that this quality of manly, valorous women is one which is constant in Corneille, one

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1. The modern critic may not agree with Aristotle, for, since Greek times, the rôle of Woman has become increasingly important, and her strength of Will has been recognized. Corneille had numerous examples of valorous women before his mind in his own time.





in which he is essentially un-Aristotelian.

The third requirement for character was égalité, or the quality of consistency. Or if a character was by nature inconsistent, he should remain consistently inconsistent. First then, we are to determine the characteristics of our personnages. Rodrigue is first presented to us as valorous even before we see him, l. 26 ff.:

Tous deux formés d'un sang noble, vaillant, fidèle,  
Jeunes, mais qui font lire aisément dans leurs yeux  
L'éclatante vertu de leurs braves aïeux.  
Don Rodrigue surtout n'a trait en son visage  
Qui d'un homme de cœur ne soit la haute image.

The first time Rodrigue appears on the stage is in sc. 5, where Don Diègue tells Rodrigue of the insult and asks him to avenge his father. Here Rodrigue acts the part of the highly valorous character: he resolves to listen only to his duty to his father, l. 346 ff.:

Courens à la vengeance;  
Et tout honteux d'avoir tant balancé,  
Ne soyons plus en peine,  
Puisqu'aujourd'hui mon père est 'offensé,  
Si l'offenseur est père de Chimène.

In insisting upon the duel with the Count, Rodrigue is consistent with his decision. In his subsequent manner towards Chimène, Rodrigue is still consistent with what he first felt to be right. In line 1515, Chimène, by a misunderstanding of his intent, accuses him of inconsistency:

Quelle inégalité ravale ta vertu?

This cannot but be a conscious touch of Aristotelianism on the part of Corneille. Rodrigue never wavers throughout the play,<sup>(1)</sup> and in

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1. Unless we except the 'stances' in which he seems to weaken for a moment, but immediately comes back to reason.





the last line, Corneille repeats the keyword to the character of his hero:

Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi.

Is Chimène similarly consistent? One would scarcely say so. She loves Rodrigue and makes no attempt to conceal the fact, until after the outcome of the fatal duel. Then she immediately becomes violent against him -- a change which is perhaps almost natural, and certainly could not be called the result of inconsistency. But this violence, we cannot help feeling, is only skin deep. Thus on both occasions, when through false reports (Act IV, sc. 5; Act V, sc. 5), Chimène believes Rodrigue to be killed, she gives way to the full expression of her love for him. She thinks that she has obtained what she was so intent upon having, yet she is thoroughly unhappy. This spirit shows itself also in conversations with Elvire, her 'confidante'. In line 810 she avows her actual situation:

C'est peu de dire aimer, Elvire: je l'adore.

Through the whole scene she shows first one side and then the other. Cf. ll. 827, 828:

Je demande sa tête, et crains de l'obtenir:  
Ma mort suivra la sienne, et je le veux punir!

Act V, sc. 1 is where Rodrigue comes before Chimène. Here we have the most vivid and dramatic clash between Chimène's two natures. She begins (l. 1465):

Quoi! Rodrigue, en plein jour! D'où te vient cette audace?  
Here she speaks like a raging lion, but she ends the scene like a lamb (l. 1555 ff):





Et si jamais l'amour échauffa tes esprits, (1)  
Sors vainqueur d'un combat dont Chimène est le prix.

But her last line here is again in the first tone:

Adieu: ce mot lâche me fait rougir de honte.

It is now apparent that the character is not consistent, but it is consistently inconsistent. In the Avertissement du Cid (2), Corneille says, "Ses mœurs (de Chimène) sont inégalement égales (3), pour parler en termes de notre Aristote, et changent suivant les circonstances des lieux, des personnes, des temps et des occasions, en conservant toujours le même principe".

To summarize our investigations as regards character, we have found that Rodrigue is semblable, is convenable, and is égal, but he lacks the first quality of the fatal weakness. He is wholly virtuous, and therefore cannot be an ideal tragic hero from the Aristotelian point of view. Chimène is not semblable, is not convenable, is not égale, although in this last point she fulfills Aristotelian requirements by being également inégale. But we found her to be valorous, and always mistress of her situation, so that she too falls short of Aristotle's requirements. The fact that our hero and heroine are essentially un-Aristotelian figures is going to affect the whole turn of the tragedy, as has been hinted in the section on Plot, and as will be manifestly proven in the following paragraphs on Katharsis.

### KATHARSIS

We have seen in the preceding sections on Plot and Character, that

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1. Variant of 1637 edition.
  2. Marty-Laveaux, III, p. 83.
  3. This changed form of the expression does not alter the essential meaning, in Corneille's mind.





the Cid did not fulfill the Aristotelian requirements in these two respects. We have said also in our first chapter that Aristotle's doctrine was that the purpose of Tragedy was the arousing of Pity and Fear, and the requirements of Plot and Character were such as to conduce to this end. Thus if the plot or the characters are un-Aristotelian, the proper Katharsis could not be effected. We have already determined that because of its happy ending, and the superhuman qualities of Rodrigue and Chimene, the subject of the Cid did not permit of tragic treatment in the Aristotelian sense.

It was for this reason that the Academie made its several suggestions as to possible remedies for this defect: Rodrigue should have been killed at the hands of the Moors, or at least by Don Sanche, or he should have died of love. Another solution would have been for Chimene to have died, and Rodrigue should then have killed himself in despair. Or if none of these were feasible, at least, the lovers should have been irretrievably separated at the end of the tragedy. Any of these melodramatic outcomes would have fulfilled the requirements of an unhappy ending, and would have introduced the tragic flaw in these superhuman characters. But, alas, it would have violated the other Aristotelian requirement of keeping intact the framework of an accepted legend! This Corneille understood full well, and it is to his credit that he was not misguided in this instance by the scathing comments of the critics.

Granted that the Cid, for these reasons, could not arouse the Aristotelian Pity and Fear, it is none the less a tragedy, which met





with overwhelming and immediate success at its appearance, and has held the public ever since. It is an heroic tragedy, à la Minto, arousing not so much Pity and Fear, but rather Admiration. In this connection, Butcher makes a very significant comment: "The true tragic fear becomes an almost impersonal emotion, attaching itself not so much to this or that particular incident, as to the general course of the action which is for us an image of human destiny. We are thrilled with awe at the greatness of the issues thus unfolded, and with the moral inevitableness of the result. In the awe so inspired the emotions of fear and pity are blended". (1) Indeed, it is 'awe' which we feel in watching the characters of Rodrigue and Chimene; it is an emotion of suspense, whose real nature is not determined until the outcome of the play, but is prepared at many points in its development. When we realize that both Rodrigue and Chimene are superhuman and will overcome all obstacles, our 'awe' loses any element of fear and becomes pure wonder or admiration. Now in our section on the meaning of admiration as used by Minto, we determined that he had in mind wonder or admiration of the skill of the poet. Corneille has now adapted the term, to mean admiration of the characters depicted by the poet. This was a very natural development for Corneille, whose fondness for the heroic and romanesque was never wholly overshadowed by his concern for the rules. Whether Corneille himself realized that by making Admiration the keynote to his play, he was establishing a new type of tragedy on the French stage, we cannot be certain. We know that Corn-

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1. Butcher, op. cit., pp. 262, 263.





eille was acquainted with Minturno's work, either directly or indirectly, for in the Examen de Polyeucte, Minturno is cited in justification of the wholly virtuous character of the hero. In the Examen de Miconède, Corneille says, "Dans l'admiration ..... je trouve une manière de purger les passions dont n'a point parlé Aristote, et qui est peut-être plus sûre que celle qu'il prescrit à la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte". But since these references to the Italian work are so long after the writing of the Cid, we have all reason to suspect that in 1636, it was the personal genius of Corneille which led him to develop the heroic type of tragedy. This necessarily brought him to set aside Pity and Fear for Admiration. We are not to believe that when Corneille wrote the Cid, he had any purpose in mind, ethical or aesthetic, other than to give pleasure to his audience. I heartily believe that he intended his characters to be admired, not for the purpose of moral uplift, but merely for enjoyment. It is not until 1660 in the Discours that he ascribed an ethical function to the Cid, and even then, he was frankly skeptical as to whether it had any ethical effect or not.

### UNITIES

Coming to the Unities, we find ourselves in the midst of the most perplexing problem in Corneille. We have followed the history of the Unities, and have seen that this had become the vital question of dramatic doctrine on the French stage. We have also recalled that in writing his first play, Corneille was completely ignorant of these rules, and that by 1636 he had become better acquainted with them,





through frequent intercourse with Chapelain and his group.

Although the Unities of Time and Place had come to have greater importance for the dramatist than the Unity of Action, we shall here return to the true Aristotelian order, and first inquire into the Unity of Plot, in the Cid.

The 'soufflet', the duel, the combat with the Moors, the duel with Don Sanche, constitute "une série principale d'actions..... qui découlent des caractères des personnages" (1), and the end of the play leaves the characters in "un état nouveau qui ait chance de durée". (1) It is true that the appearance of the Moors comes late in the play, contrary to the theory which Corneille himself was later to set up, that all actors should either appear or be mentioned in the first Act. In so far as the battle with the Moors has no direct relation to the love of Rodrigue and Chimène, it may be considered to harm the Unity of Action. But, on the other hand, since this victory was the source of Rodrigue's great favor with the King, and this favor brings about the happy ending of the play, the scene with the Moors (which, it will be recalled, is not presented in the play), may be said to be truly a part of the principal action.

Thus far we have left out of consideration the rôle of the Infanta. In the Spanish original the Infanta played an important part, but the Spanish play, limited by no Unities, covered about a year's time. Rigal (2) describes Corneille's situation as follows, "En supprimant la scène où Rodrigue est armé chevalier, celle du duel, celle où Rodrigue, au loin, devant un château, fait la rencontre de

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1. Definition of Unity of Action given by Lemaître: Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote. Paris, 1886.

2. De Jodelle à Molière, p. 216.





l'Infante, j'ai (Corneille) supprimé tous les points de contact entre cette Infante et Rodrigue; dès lors, à quoi ce personnage servirait-il? A rehausser Rodrigue par les sentiments qu'éprouve une fille de roi pour un simple chevalier, et à faire aussi mieux apprécier l'amour que Rodrigue porte à Chimène? Soit; mais c'est sans doute là un motif insuffisant pour faire paroître et parler à maintes reprises l'Infante, et je ne puis me dissimuler que ce personnage compromet l'unité que je venais d'assurer à la pièce". But he consoles himself, "les beaux esprits m'en voudront beaucoup moins de compromettre l'unité d'action que de manquer à la règle des vingt-quatre heures, et le public ne m'en voudra sans doute pas du tout". In this last clause there is a certain amount of romantic irony, and we see the playwright whose first interest is to please the public. (1) Corneille is made to admit that the Infanta is extraneous to the action, but by saying that the role is historical, we have cleared Corneille of any accusation of an absolute lack of dramatic sense. For Corneille, history could not be meddled with, and he had nothing to change in the facts themselves. But one wonders, since Corneille struck out so much from his model, if he did not perhaps have a stronger reason for retaining the figure of the Infanta than mere history. And indeed there are two important ends served by the Infanta. In the first place, she represents the 'amour courtois', together with Rodrigue, 'le parfait amant'. One has but to turn to the grands romans of Honoré d'Urfé and Mlle de Scudéry, to find the 'amour courtois', which was enjoying such great vogue at the time. The Infanta appealed to Corneille as a figure who

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1. Cf. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, p. 48.





would take well at the court. We have seen how the play was built up around a Neo-Platonic ideal, and the Infanta fits into this Neo-Platonic system of life where all is courtly, nothing real. Rodrigue's glory is much enhanced by the love of the royal Infanta, and he is made a more noble suitor for Chimène. In the second place, the Infanta is a foil to Chimène. No novel or play was complete without a foil to the heroine. The Infanta is the complement to Chimène, just as Don Sanche is the complement to Rodrigue. Both hero and heroine must have their foils, to make the structure of the play complete and perfectly balanced. No one has thought to challenge Don Sanche as endangering the Unity of Action, and we might say that the Infanta serves the same purpose in the play. We have now suggested three possible reasons for the retention of the role of the Infanta, but we have not proven that she does not injure the effect of unity in the *ensemble*. She is decidedly weak on the dramatic side (1), and Corneille was here led astray by the 'grands romans' and their Celadons. In summary we may say that the Cid has Unity of Action, with this single exception of the role of the Infanta.(2)

Next in the true Aristotelian order comes the Unity of Time. This we have seen to be the unfortunate victim of the rationalizing process of the Renaissance Italian critics, and we have seen how Castelvetro insists that the time of the action coincide with that of the representation. Now Corneille's situation is interesting. It

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1. At only one point does the Infanta take any real part in the action (Act IV, sc. 2), and then it is without result.
  2. As the *Cid* is now performed, the role of the Infanta is generally omitted, thus giving to the play perfect Unity of Action.





will be remembered (1) that in the Examen to Méliste, he says that the Unity of Action and that of Place had been revealed to him through mere common sense, but not so with the Unity of Time.

When we judge the Cid by the twenty-four hour rule, we are a little puzzled. In the passage quoted from Rigal concerning the Unity of Action, we are made aware of the great effort which Corneille made to reduce his Spanish original to the dimensions of a well-ordered play. But the subject was too big, and did not lend itself to a twenty-four hour arrangement. However, Corneille made a very conscious effort to limit it to one day, even though it brought a murder, a battle with the Moors, and the betrothal of the girl to the murderer of her father, all in one day.

If we go through the play, verse by verse, we can gather a goodly number of quotations in which there seems to be a very pointed reference to the duration of time in the play. I shall point out here some of the most marked instances. We apparently begin in the early afternoon (2), since in l. 39, Elvire says to the count:

Il alloit au conseil, dont l'heure qui pressoit,  
A tranché ce discours qu'à peine il commençoit.

By line 629, we are in the evening:

L'effroi que produiroit cette alarme inutile,  
Dans la nuit qui survient troubleroit trop la ville.

In line 865, it would seem as if we are being reminded that the poet is not infringing on the rules:

Ah! quelle cruauté, qui tout en un jour tue  
Le père par le fer, la fille par la vue.

1. Cf. supra, Ch. IV, pp. 61, 62.

2. Cf. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, p. 186, note 3.





This, however, might be accidental (l. 975):

Dans l'ombre de la nuit, cache bien ton depart.

Here we are well into the night, ll. 1075, 1076:

Les Eores vont descendre, et le flux et la nuit  
Dans une heure à nos murs les amène sans bruit.

Here we can have no doubt but that Corneille 'stuck in' the time element as a warning against objectors. To give a concrete time limit is not within the habits of classic drama. But the most striking reference in the whole play is ll. 1107, 1108:

Trois heures de combat laissent à nos guerriers,  
Une victoire entière et deux rois prisonniers.

Petit de Julleville says in regard to this line: "La bataille a duré trois heures, Elvire l'annonce à Chimène, comme pour bien préciser devant les spectateurs que la règle fatale est observée dans sa rigueur: il peut y avoir vingt heures que la pièce est commencée. Il en reste quatre pour l'achever; et ces quatre heures suffiront." (1) In l. 1169 we have come to the next day, but not beyond the twenty-four hours.

Hier ce devoir te mit en une haute estime.

In l. 1175 we have another reference to the second day:

Ce qui fut juste alors ne l'est plus aujourd'hui

and again in l. 1435:

Après ce que Rodrigue a fait voir aujourd'hui.

But these references to a second day do not necessarily mean that the play exceeds twenty-four hours, since we began in the afternoon, and have until the following noon to complete the action. In l. 1447 ff. we have another striking<sup>ly</sup> pointed time reference:

Sortir d'une bataille, et combattre à l'instant!  
Rodrigue a pris haleine en vous la racontant.  
Du moins une heure ou deux je veux qu'il se délasse.



1911, November 12, at the residence of the writer.

The writer is of the opinion that the writer

has no other than the writer, 1911, 1912, 1913.

The writer is of the opinion that the writer

has no other than the writer, 1911, 1912, 1913.

The writer is of the opinion that the writer

has no other than the writer, 1911, 1912, 1913.

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has no other than the writer, 1911, 1912, 1913.

The writer is of the opinion that the writer

This, like l. 1107, leaves no doubt as to its 'raison d'être.' Corneille himself admitted later that it was unfortunate to have thus called attention to the time element. (1) In l. 1729, Corneille has slipped in a little dramatic illusion for the public, trusting that the eagle eyes of 'les doctes' would not find it:

Enfin Rodrigue est mort, et sa mort m'a changée  
D'implacable ennemi en amante affligée.

For the moment, the public could substitute for twenty-four hours, an indefinite period. The same is true of l. 1741:

Enfin elle aime, Sire, et ne croit plus un crime  
D'avouer par sa bouche un amour légitime.

The whole matter of the Unity of Time comes to a head in ll. 1805 ff. (1637 ed.)

Sire, quelle apparence, à ce triste hyménée  
Qu'un même jour commence et finisse mon deuil,  
Mette en mon lit Rodrigue et mon père au cercueil?

The king answers (ll. 1813 ff.):

Le temps assez souvent a rendu légitime  
Ce qui sembloit d'abord ne se pouvoir sans crime:  
Rodrigue t'a gagnée, et tu dois être à lui.  
Mais quoique sa valeur t'ait conquise aujourd'hui,  
Il faudroit que je fusse ennemi de ta gloire,  
Pour lui donner sitôt le prix de sa victoire.  
Cet hymen différé ne rompt point une loi  
Qui sans marquer de temps, lui destine ta foi.  
Prends un an, si tu veux, pour essuyer tes larmes.

Here Corneille falls from the pedestal and comes back to common sense, in time to save his play from a grotesque improbability.

The last line of the play sounds this same note:

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1. Discours de la Tragedie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 96: "je me suis toujours repenti d'avoir fait dire au Roi, dans le Cid, qu'il vouloit que Rodrigue se délassât une heure ou deux après la défaite des Maures avant que de combattre don Sanche: je l'avois fait pour montrer que la pièce étoit dans les vingt-quatre heures; et cela n'a servi qu'à avertir les spectateurs de la contrainte avec laquelle je l'y ai réduite."





*Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi.*

In summary, we are then forced to say that the play does observe the strict Unity of Time, but that it loses by so doing. Corneille is fundamentally un-Aristotelian as regards the time element. He plans a play which requires weeks or months, and superimposes upon this plan an unnatural Unity of Time. The result is that the Unity of Time is maintained formally, not naturally.

The Unity of Place in the Cid affords an interesting study also. In a preceding chapter, I have spoken of the multiplex scenery of the sixteenth century stage, and Matzke, in his study of the Unity of Place in the Cid, (1) says: "The Cid was written for and played with the so-called multiplex decoration." This is in apparent contradiction with what we find in Jusserand (2): "For the Cid all you want is a room with four doors"; and the list of movables contains one single article, "an armchair for the king." This direction is taken from the "Memoire de Mahelot", but we must consider this as the decoration for later presentations of the Cid, when the multiplex scenery had fallen into disuse and been supplanted by the "palais a volonte", a change which came some time after 1637.

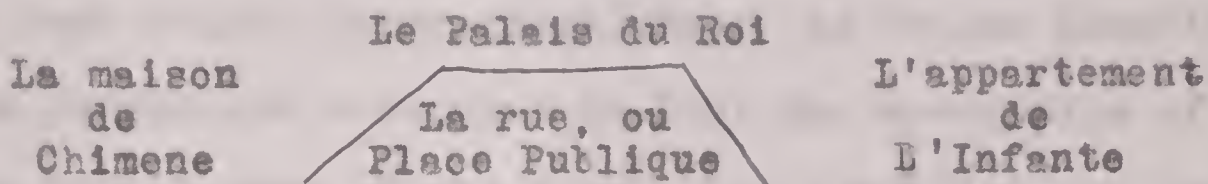
The Unity of Place in the Cid depends largely upon the Unity of Time. Because of the Unity of Time, Rodrigue cannot go to fight the Moors, so the Moors must come to him. Now they could not come on land as quickly as by sea, so the scene of the play is put at Seville which could be reached by water. In the name of the Unities, Corneille is forced to misrepresent facts.

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1. M.L.N., 1898, pp. 393-409. This study supercedes that of F. M. Warren in M.L.N., 1895, pp. 1-10.
  2. Shakespeare in France, New York, 1899, p. 73.





Four different localities within the city are necessary for the Cid: The apartments of the king, those of the Infante, those of Chimene, and a street or public square. With the multiplex scenery this works very well. The following diagram shows the probable arrangement of the stage: (1)



The Unity of Place has been maintained, according to the multiplex arrangement (2) and leaves nothing for comment, except in the last four scenes of Act. I, and a few minor inconsistencies. We may be sure that Scudery clutched at these opportunities for criticism, with particular emphasis on the first. Matzke has pointed out (3) that "while the unity of place has been kept intact and was evidently the open square throughout the act, the arrangement of the last four scenes is nevertheless open to criticism. Don Diegue and the Count appeared from the palace of the king (4), thereby leading the audience to suppose that the locality had changed, and nothing in their dialogue could correct the impression. This may, therefore, be one of the faults criticized by Scudery".

Scudery's objection reads: "Le theatre en est si mal entendu, qu'un meme lieu representant l'appartement du Roi, celui de l'Infante, la maison de Chimene et la rue, presque sans changer de face ( as was

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1. This diagram has been taken from Matzken J.E.,
  2. Cf. supra, ch. IV, p. M.L.N., 1899, p. 401.
  3. Loc. cit., p. 403.
  4. At beginning of scene 3. Cf. Examen, for Corneille's casuistical explanation of 1660. It could only apply to the later method of presenting the Cid which prevailed at the time the Examen was written. Cf. Matzke, loc. cit., pp. 403, 404.





inevitable with the system of multiplex scenery) le spectateur ne sait le plus souvent où en sont les acteurs." (1) Professor Lancaster thinks that Scudéry's criticism was directed against something more general than this, for the audiences were certainly accustomed to such slight 'invraisemblances' as Matzke describes. It should be remembered also that in 1637 the conception of Unity of Place was merely that of one town. The dramatist was quite at liberty to use as many localities within the town as suited his subject. This argument rather strengthens Lancaster's position. The confusion, to which Scudéry refers, may have resulted from a simplified system of multiplex scenery which was being used in 1637, during the period of transition from the multiplex scenery to the 'palais à volonté'. Whatever the basis of Scudéry's remark, it was unjust in that it might as well have been said of all the plays at the time. Chapelain admits this injustice in the Sentimens. The strict interpretation of Unity of Place was as yet only an idea in Chapelain's mind. Lancaster (2) says, "What Dannheisser calls 'Zimmereinheit', subsequently established on the classic French stage, was as yet unknown." The Cid may, for this reason, be said to have Unity of Place, since the action takes place in but one city, and it was possible to present simultaneously on the stage, several localities in the city.

We have now completed the study of the Unities, and we must, in all fairness, say that Corneille made every effort to comply with the contemporary interpretation of them. Where he did not succeed, it

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1. Gaste, op. cit., p. 95.
  2. P.M.L.A., 1908, p. 314.





was due to the irregularity of his Spanish model, and to the essentially romanesque nature of the subject, with its underlying element of fancy, which did not lend itself to any restraining Unities.

### VERISIMILITUDE

To complete our study of the Cid, we should analyse briefly Corneille's application of Verisimilitude to this borrowed subject. Since it was an historical subject, Corneille could not change the principal event. Realizing, on the other hand, that it was not 'vraisemblable' for a young noblewoman to marry her father's murderer, even though a reasonable time elapse between the two incidents, Corneille quotes in the Avertissement du Cid the Spanish romance, thus justifying himself in fact. He also attenuated the circumstances somewhat by giving only the suggestion of the marriage and not having Rodrigue and Chimène actually marry at the close of the play. This, however, is not an effective answer to Scudéry's objection that the subject of the play "ne peut estre vraisemblable; et par conséquent il choque une des principales règles du Poème." In this instance again, we find Corneille led astray by the Italians, for Scaliger had maintained that if an action had the sanction of actual though unique occurrence, then it must have the sanction of verisimilitude. Corneille here follows Scaliger even more than Castelvetro, who had all but discarded historic actions from poetry, on the ground that the poet is a poet only by his invention of plot.(1) As we have seen in our earlier section on Plot, Corneille's natural tendency was to the

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1. Cf. his 'ingegno a trovare'. Cf. supra. Ch. II, p. 32.





romanesque 'invraisemblance', and the only authority left him was that of historical occurrence. It was this romanesque quality which made the Cid unpsychological, 'invraisemblable', and therefore un-Aristotelian.

In studying the Unities, we saw that it was in the name of a false 'vraisemblance' that Seville is made the capital of Castille. The 'soufflet' also, was a matter of some thought to Corneille. To his mind it seemed 'invraisemblable' that a buffet should be administered to a favorite in the presence of the king. Rigal makes Corneille say (1), "Peut-etre se permettait-on au XIIe siècle, de souffleter le favori d'un souverain devant le souverain même; mais les spectateurs sont des hommes d'aujourd'hui et ils trouveroient qu'un pareil acte manque singulièrement de respect à la majesté royale." In the Cid, accordingly, the Count and Don Diègue have come out alone from the council before the fatal blow is struck. In one other detail also, Corneille modifies the Spanish play, to agree with the 'bienséances' of the French stage: in the Spanish model there was no difficulty about the burial of the Count, but in the extreme concentration of the French tragedy to have diverted the attention at that point from Chimène and Rodrigue, would have been to lose the dramatic effect and the unity of the whole. As usual, Scudéry comments on this seeming neglect, and terms it an "extravagance" that Chimène should consent to the marriage with Rodrigue, when her murdered father still

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1. De Jodelle à Molière, p. 217.





lies without burial in the house. (1) In these instances, however, Corneille was strong enough to hold out against the facts of history and follow his dramatic instinct, but in far more important situations we have found him giving in. Much of the appeal of the Spanish play was lost in the French Cid, through this unfortunate, yet almost unavoidable, attempt to treat the subject along the lines of Aristotelain doctrine. I say 'unavoidable', since the critics were continually on the alert, and at the poet's heels, and I say 'unfortunate', since a romanesque subject, although fundamentally 'invraisemblable', can make a most fascinating play, as the Cid did. The modern reader feels as did Boileau and his contemporaries:

Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue. (2)

### CONCLUSION

In the course of this study we have found that the Cid is un-Aristotelain in every point except the Unities. The plot was 'invraisemblable', because the characters were in themselves un-psychological and 'invraisemblables'. Having posited these facts, we come to the inevitable conclusion that the Aristotelian Katharsis was not produced. For since our characters were not such as to arouse pity and fear, the play could not be Aristotelian in its outcome. Verisimilitude, which we have shown to underlie all the other rules of the Poetic Art, was entirely lacking in the Cid. But the Unities we found to be strictly observed, even though at a heavy cost. Yet one must realize that all the other demands of Tragedy must

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, 101, note 1.

2. Satires, IX, 1. 60.





be inherent in its subject, and the Unities alone are an external feature. They are simply the cadre, a "bienséance du théâtre", but not essential to the nature of Tragedy. It is for this reason that Corneille could impose the Unities, although imperfectly, on the play, since they are something to be imposed from without, whereas all of the other qualities are necessarily inherent in a subject, or remain totally absent from it, as here.

### THE QUARREL OF THE CID

It will not be necessary to trace here, even in outline form, the various phases of the attacks and counter-attacks, which made up the Quarrel of the Cid. This is probably the most famous literary quarrel in the history of French letters, and many volumes and chapters in larger works have been devoted to it. (1) We need only concern ourselves here with those criticisms which bear upon one of our topics, and the answers, direct or otherwise, made by Corneille to them. The documents which we shall need to consider are the Observations sur le Cid of Scudéry; the Sentimens de l'Académie sur le Cid, written for the most part by Chapelain; and the Épître of La Suivante, which was written during the heat of the quarrel.

The Observations were a venomous attack, consisting of some ninety-six pages. (2) Scudéry puts forth six objections to the play

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1. The history of the Quarrel is given with all the accompanying documents in Gasté, Armand: La Querelle du Cid, Paris, 1898. Cf. also Marty-Laveaux III, pp. 16 ff.
  2. 40 pages in Gasté, op. cit., pp. 71-111.





which we shall list in order: "1) Que le sujet n'en vaut rien du tout; 2) Qu'il choque les principales règles du poème dramatique; 3) Qu'il manque de jugement en sa conduite; 4) Qu'il a beaucoup de méchants vers; 5) Que presque tout ce qu'il a de beautés sont dérobées; et 6) Qu'ainsi l'estime qu'on en fait est injuste."

Scudéry's program was ambitious! But our comments on the Observations may be very brief, for all but the first two of Scudéry's accusations bear on details of 'bienséance', style, and versification, which echo fittingly his petty jealousy, and are no part of our present study. As for the first objection, that the subject was worthless, we have spoken of it before, in discussing the Cid and have said that it was thoroughly justifiable from the Aristotelian point of view. The subject had a happy ending which immediately condemned it for the perfect tragedy. But Scudéry upholds his objection very weakly, and adduces only the fact that the reversal of fortune comes too early in the play. The true reason for discarding this subject from Tragedy, we have seen, was its lack of Verisimilitude. Instead of giving this first, Scudéry considers this objection under the second heading: "Qu'il choque les principales règles du poème dramatique." Scudéry includes under this objection, also, his discussion of the happy ending, the episodic nature of the Infanta's role, the over-crowding of the incidents, and the lack of Unity of Place. The third objection bears especially upon the horrifying marriage, or projected marriage, of Chimène and Rodrigue. This whole section is devoted to





the seventeenth century 'bienséances' which do not concern our problem. Similarly, the fourth and fifth headings bear no relationship to the Aristotelian theory of drama. And the conclusion that the play did not merit the success it had, is the judgment of the envious rival, for the more impartial critic, Chapelain, could not deny that the play had "des grâces qui ne sont pas communes." (1)

The Quarrel continued through the greater part of the year, and in September, Corneille took occasion to write his Epître dédicatoire to La Suivante, which is the only place in which we can find definitely stated at this time any theories of Corneille himself. This was a more or less direct answer to the many attacks which had been flooding in on the author of the Cid. This Epître dédicatoire is headed "A Monsieur\*\*\*" and cannot be identified as being addressed to anyone in particular. It was merely a 'cadre' for the expression of Corneille's theories.

The tone of the whole Epître is well indicated in the following passage from the beginning: "Je traite toujours mon sujet le moins mal qu'il m'est possible ..... Si je ne fais bien, qu'un autre fasse mieux; je ferai des vers à sa louange, au lieu de le censurer" and he observes that "nous pardonnons beaucoup de choses aux anciens; nous admirons quelquefois dans leurs écrits ce que nous ne souffririons pas dans les nôtres..... Le docte Scaliger a remarqué des taches dans tous les Latins, et de moins savants que lui en

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1. Sentimens, in Gasté, A. : La Querelle du Cid, p. 415.





remarqueroient bien dans les Grecs, et dans son Virgile même.....Je vous laisse donc à penser si notre présomption ne seroit pas ridicule, de prétendre qu'une exacte censure ne pût mordre sur nos ouvrages.....Je ne me suis jamais imaginé avoir mis rien au jour de parfait, je n'espère pas même y pouvoir jamais arriver; je fais néanmoins mon possible pour en approcher, et les plus beaux succès des autres ne produisent en moi qu'une vertueuse émulation, qui me fait redoubler mes efforts afin d'en avoir de pareils."

Somewhat later in the same Epître he comes again to general statements of principle and we have the famous declaration: "J'aime à suivre les règles; mais loin de me rendre leur esclave, je les élargis et resserre selon le besoin qu'en a mon sujet, et je romps même sans scrupule celle qui regarde la durée de l'action, quand sa sévérité me semble absolument incompatible avec les beautés des événements que je décris. Savoir les règles, et entendre le secret de les apprivoiser adroitement avec notre théâtre, ce sont deux sciences bien différentes; et peut-être que pour faire maintenant réussir une pièce, ce n'est pas assez d'avoir étudié dans les livres d'Aristote et d'Horace. ....notre premier but doit être de plaire à la cour et au peuple..... Il faut, s'il se peut, y ajouter les règles, afin de ne déplaire pas aux savants, et recevoir un applaudissement universel; mais surtout gagnons la voix publique; autrement, notre pièce aura beau être régulière, si elle est sifflée au théâtre, les savants n'oseront se déclarer en notre faveur, et aimeront mieux





dire que nous aurons mal entendu les règles, que de nous donner des louanges quand nous serons décriés par le consentement general de ceux qui ne voient la comédie que pour se divertir." These passages which we have just quoted make up nearly the whole Epître, so that it is immediately clear that Corneille's purpose was to present his own theories, without regard to La Suivante in itself. It is very apparent that Corneille was not as yet submissive to the general criticisms which had been passed on his Cid, and it was only the appearance of the Sentimens de l'Académie sur le Cid that really crushed Corneille, temporarily at least.

The Sentimens were drawn up for the most part by Chapelain, the spokesman of the newly-founded Academy. Richelieu rejected the first forms of the Sentimens, and it was only the third redaction that was made public. In it, Chapelain "avait tâché d'équilibrer de son mieux le mal que le cardinal l'obligeait à dire de la pièce, et le bien qu'il en pensait lui-même".(1) This work gave detailed answers to each of the Observations made by Scudéry, and in the main, Chapelain agrees with the 'observateur', but he always gives a more moderate expression to his criticisms.

It is interesting to note that Chapelain reproaches Scudéry for not having followed Aristotle's order<sup>of topics</sup> in his Observations. Chapelain represented pure criticism, but Scudéry's remarks were too envious to permit of a well-ordered presentation. Chapelain agrees with Scudéry in his point of view,

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1. Lanson, Histoire, p. 424.





that it is not so much a question of whether the Cid did give pleasure, but whether it should, as a matter of fact, have given pleasure. Therefore Chapelain agrees readily on the moral side, that the Cid did not portray the reward of virtue and punishment of crime, but he would permit the fantastic changes in the historical plot by which Corneille might have avoided the 'dénouement'. In this, Chapelain is distinctly un-Aristotelian, as also in seeking a didactic function for Tragedy. In the other points, Chapelain accepts generally Scudéry's objections, though making some slight modifications. Yet Chapelain closes the Sentimens rather favorably to Corneille: "...cet agrément inexplicable qui se mesle dans tous ses defaux luy ont acquis un rang considerable entre les Poëmes François de ce genre qui ont le plus donné de satisfaction". Here Chapelain admits the existence of some intangible elements which made of the Cid an immortal masterpiece.

After the appearance of the Sentimens, the Quarrel was officially closed, and Scudéry cleverly feigned, in an obsequious letter of thanks to the Academy, to have triumphed over Corneille. The Quarrel had lasted nearly a year, for the Sentimens did not appear until November. Corneille was crushed by the official verdict, and the consequences were great and oftentimes grievous. If the Norman lawyer showed a disdainful front in the Epître to La Suivante, he was in reality "le plus timide et le plus docile des hommes".(1)

We shall see in the following chapter on Horace that Corneille familiarized himself with the works of the critics, during

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1. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, p. 56.





the three years which intervened between the appearance of the Cid and that of Horace. How much progress he made at this time in theoretical knowledge, cannot be determined definitely, since his own theoretic writings did not appear until 1660. All we can hope to do, is to trace in the plays of the next period, reminiscences of these months of study.





## CHAPTER VI - HORACE

Shortly after the first successes of the Cid, Corneille set to work on his next tragedy, Horace.<sup>(1)</sup> Although begun in 1637, the new play did not appear until the beginning of 1640.<sup>(2)</sup> The 'Querelle du Cid', as we have just seen, was officially ended in the autumn of 1637, but it left Corneille discouraged and disheartened, and he spent much of his time now in learning those ominous rules which had just threatened his ruin. The results of this period of study will be seen in the discussion of Horace. It is not known for a certainty in which theater Horace was first presented, but all indications point to the Hotel de Bourgogne as the probable scene of the first performance.<sup>(3)</sup>

As regards sources, it is not very apparent that Corneille was indebted to any of the three dramatists who had preceded him in the handling of this subject (4), unless it be to Lope de Vega. But the Honrado Hermano partakes much more of the tragi-comedy, and the whole conduct of the play is so far from the French tragedy, that it seems justifiable to consider that the two plays were wholly independent. Corneille himself indicated as his source Bk. I of Livy's History of Rome, to

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, pp. 248 ff.

2. The approximate date is the end of February, or the first week in March. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, p. 249.

3. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, p. 251.

4. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, pp. 245 ff. Cf. also Riddle's Johns Hopkins dissertation (to be published) which shows that Dionysius may have been a more important source for Corneille.





which may be added Plutarch's Life of Tullus.

Much more subservient now to the rules and their arbiters, than at the time when he wrote the Cid, Corneille himself read the play before a group of critics, including Chapelain, Boissier and d'Aulignac.<sup>(1)</sup> This reading took place before the first performance of the play, but it is very significant that Corneille did not act on the suggestions made by Chapelain and d'Aulignac. We shall consider these suggestions in their respective places under the topical treatments.

PLOT This time, Corneille chose his subject from Roman history, in which he was following one of Aristotle's precepts: to choose an illustrious deed from an illustrious family. The subject seems then capable of Aristotelian treatment. Turning immediately to an analysis of the plot, it is apparent that the war between Rome and Alia, the duel of six brothers, and the final murder, form the external action. But, as in the Cid, most of these actions are only narrated, including the first battle-array, the choosing of the combatants, and the duel. Horace is an inner drama of the same type as the Cid. The subject is not political, it is psychological, universal. The real subject is the conflict of ideals between Horace, symbol of Patriotism, and Camille, symbol of Love; but both, symbols of an equal Will. We have already discussed such psychological action, and we came to the decision that it might be admitted by Aristotle, through extensions of the original Greek text. But psychological action is determined by character, and therefore is essentially un-Aristotelian,

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, pp. 254 ff.





since action no longer predominates over character. The latter is a constant factor in the Cornelian tragedies, for Corneille was intent upon portraying the Human Will in conflict; the Will is an element of Character, and results in, but is not resultant upon, Action.

In the construction of the plot, Horace is built on the complex plan, with reversal of fortune. As in the Cid again, the fortune is reversed several times before the final reversal. Let us trace the rise and fall of fortune throughout the play. In lines 173 ff., misfortune is at hand:

Ce jour nous fut propice et funeste à la fois:  
Unissant nos maisons, il désunit nos rois.  
Un même instant conclut notre hymen et la guerre,  
Fit naître notre espoir et le jeta par terre,  
Nous ôta tout, sitôt qu'il nous eut tout promis,  
Et nous faisant amants, il nous fit ennemis.

But good fortune is promised by the words of the oracle, lines 195 ff.:

Albe et Rome demain prendront une autre face;  
Tes vœux sont exaucés, elles auront la paix,  
Et tu seras unie avec ton Curiace,  
Sans qu'aucun mauvais sort t'en sépare jamais.

We know how this prophecy was fulfilled: Rome and Alba were indeed left in peace after the combat, and Camille and Curiace were joined in death. In the original form of the play, the fifth act ended with one more scene in which Julie, the 'confidante', recalled the words of the oracle, the meaning of which is now clear. But at the time of their first utterance, they were misinterpreted to mean a true good fortune, which is immediately reversed again (ll. 215 ff.):

Mais je me trouve enfin, malgré tous mes souhaits,  
Au jour d'une bataille, et non pas d'une paix.





But the fortune rises again in l. 273:

C'est la paix qui chez vous me donne un libre accès.  
This is at the point where the champions are to be chosen for both sides. This moment's relief is undone by the announcement of the choice of the brothers on both sides. Here the plot is designedly Aristotelian, for the situation as the three brothers go to fight against the three brothers-in-law, calls forth pity and terror (ll. 783 ff.):

A voir de tels amis, des personnes si proches,  
Venir pour leur patrie aux mortelles approches,  
L'un s'ement de pitié, l'autre est saisi d'horreur.  
L'autre d'un si grand zèle admire la fureur;  
Tel porte jusqu'aux cieux leur vertu sans égale.

We shall have occasion to come back to these lines in connection with Katharsis, but let us continue now to trace the development of the Plot. Line 792 marks good fortune again:

On s'écrie, on s'avance, enfin on les sépare.

But the fortune falls again after the sacrifice to the gods, and the combat takes place. Line 995 introduces the lowest ebb of fortune, with the false report of Julie:

Rome est sujette d'Alce, et vos fils sont défaits;  
Des trois les deux sont morts, son époux seul vous  
reste.

This is followed by the threat of the elder Horace, to kill the son who fled. Continued misfortune and the final outcome are foreshadowed in ll. 1052 ff.

Dieux! verrons-nous toujours des malheurs de la sorte?  
Nous faudra-t-il toujours en craindre de plus grands,  
Et toujours redouter la main de nos parents?

In this closely-knit development, and in the accumulation of misfortune, the Plot is thoroughly Aristotelian. After the





misunderstanding as to the outcome of the battle, the fortune rises to its highest point, and the victorious Horace is acclaimed the hero of the day (l. 1141 ff.):

O mon fils! ô ma joie! ô l'honneur de nos jours!  
O d'un Etat penchant l'inespéré secours!  
Vertu digne de Rome, et sang digne d'Horace!  
Appui de ton pays, et gloire de ta race!

Some critics, including Voltaire, hold that this should be the 'dénouement' of the play (1), since they interpret the subject as the victory of Rome or Alba, making of it a political subject. But Corneille did not so intend it, for as has been pointed out, "he was emphasizing rather the spiritual struggle between the characters than the purely political conflict between two cities".(2) He thereby made "the human or universal element most prominent", and this renders the subject more Aristotelian. To have stopped the play with the political victory, would have made no tragedy, since the ending is happy, whereas Aristotle required an unhappy ending, as Corneille had well learned in the Cid. Corneille's conception of his plot is then Aristotelian thus far. In l. 1203, Camille sums up the plot and brings out the several minor reversals of fortune before the final blow:

En vit-on jamais un (3) dont les rudes traverses  
Prissent en moins de rien tant de faces diverses,

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1. Cf. Commentaire sur Corneille, in Moland edition of Œuvres, vol. XXXI, p. 304: "Ici la pièce est finie, l'action est complètement terminée. Il s'agissait de la victoire, et elle est remportée du destin de Rome, et il est décidé." And as he begins the remarks on Act IV, sc. 3, he says, "Voici donc une autre pièce qui commence; le sujet en est bien moins grand, moins intéressant, moins théâtral, que celui de la première. Ces deux actions différentes ont nui au succès complet des Horaces."
  2. Nitze, W. A. and Galpin, S. L., ed. of Corneille's selected plays, New York, 1907, p. 348.
  3. Un jour.





Qui fût doux tant de fois, et tant de fois cruel,  
Et portât tant de coups avant le coup mortel?

She then gives a summary of the whole action, to this point, and in l. 1293, addressed to her brother, Horace, foreshadows the final catastrophe:

Et toi, bientôt souiller par quelque lâcheté  
Cette gloire si chère à ta brutalité.

This is followed in ll. 1319, 1320 by the killing of Camille:

C'est trop, ma patience à la raison fait place;  
Va deçans les enfers plaindre ton Curiace.

and Horace reappears on the stage with the line:

. . . . . Ainsi recoive un châtiment soudain  
Quiconque ose pleurer un ennemi romain!

Beginning at this point, the Aristotelianism breaks down. The killing of Camille is the fatal error of the character of Horace, but Corneille paints it as a strength. Had Horace repented and killed himself with the same sword which had killed his sister, the play would have been completely Aristotelian. But instead, Horace justifies his deed, is pardoned by his father and his king, and the play ends with a triumphant cry for Horace (l. 1759):

Vis donc, Horace, vis, guerrier trop magnanime;  
Ta vertu met ta gloire au-dessus de ton crime;

Aristotelian, then, in subject and in treatment up to the very end, the play breaks down in its 'dénouement'. To find the reason for this, we must go back to the very beginning of our study. We saw that the subject was chosen from history. Herein lay the fallacy, for Aristotle, although admitting historical subjects, did not permit the poet to alter the framework of a well-known story. Consequently, not





every real event is capable of tragic treatment in the Aristotelian manner. The subject of Horace is un-Aristotelian, for it is a possible improbability, and Aristotle, as we have seen, states that probable impossibilities are to be preferred to possible improbabilities, since the former are more readily credible. We have said that Verisimilitude is the basis of Aristotle's doctrine, and this is in contradistinction to the truth of history, a basic principle which Corneille never grasped. His idea was, "c'est l'Histoire qui persuade avec empire", and with the truth of history on his side, Corneille sought no further justification. In the Preface to Héraclius, we shall find that he even goes so far as to say that the plot of a tragedy "doit n'être pas vraisemblable", that it should go "au de là du vraisemblable". In Horace, lines 431 ff. give clearly Corneille's conception of plot:

Le sort qui de l'honneur nous ouvre la barrière  
 Offre à notre constance une illustre matière;  
 Il épuise sa force à former un malheur  
 Pour mieux se mesurer avec notre valeur;  
 Et comme il voit en nous des âmes peu communes  
Hors de l'ordre commun il nous fait des fortunes.

CHARACTER Here we have the analysis of the plot and the character of our hero. Corneille seeks always, in history, an illustrious example, of an uncommon situation, calling forth uncommon, superhuman qualities of character. Horace goes to the performance of his duty without reluctance; he sees only the eternal glory of the situation. Curiace, on the other hand, represents the Aristotelian character, essentially good, but not superhuman. He cannot be deterred from





his duty, but he confesses the anguish of the moment. (1.462):

Je n'ai point consulté pour suivre mon devoir;  
Notre longue amitié, l'amour, ni l'alliance,  
N'ont pu mettre un moment mon esprit en balance,

and ll. 467 ff:

Je crois faire pour elle autant que vous pour Rome;  
J'ai le coeur aussi bon, mais enfin je suis homme  
.....  
Et si Rome demande une vertu plus haute,  
Je rends grâces aux Dieux de n'être pas Romain,  
Pour conserver encor quelque chose d'humain.

But it must be remembered that Curiace is not Corneille's hero.

Horace remains throughout the play, the triumphant hero.

If we follow the character of Horace through the play, we find constant references to his vertu which Camille and Curiace term "barbare" and "une âpre vertu". He never flinches for a moment, and after the killing of Camille, unrelenting, unmoved, he comes forth in the name of Reason to justify his deed. It is at this point that le vieil Horace expresses his attitude towards the murder of Camille. (1) He recognizes in it, the 'excess of virtue' which made Horace guilty:

Il (2) mêle à nos vertus des marques de faiblesse,  
Et rarement accorde à notre ambition  
L'entier et pur honneur d'une bonne action.

The 'marque de faiblesse' in Horace, was the error into which he fell, as a result of his greatest virtue: his love of Rome. It was in other words, the weakness of his strength. The elder Horace refers several times to this quality which he calls a

1. Act V, sc. 1.

2. Le jugement céleste.





"vertu trop sévère"(1), and in ll. 1655, 1656 he says of Horace:

Le seul amour de Rome a sa main animée:  
Il seroit innocent s'il l'avoit moins aimée.

This is pure Aristotelianism, and there can be no doubt that it was conscious on the part of Corneille. The misfortune is that we cannot determine whether such passages were inserted at the suggestion of Chapelain and his group, either before or after the first performance, or whether they were in the original form of the play as conceived by Corneille. What is certain, is that they are conscious reminiscences of the quarrel of the Cid, and are part of the serious effort which Corneille made to improve on the Cid. There we saw that Rodrigue had no tragic flaw, which immediately barred him from the rank of Aristotelian characters. Horace, on the contrary, has all the requirements of a perfect tragic hero, except in the 'dénouement' where he triumphs, instead of meeting an unhappy end.

Let us choose enough lines from the role of Horace to show his character. In his first speech, l. 378, he says:

La gloire de ce choix m'enfle d'un juste orgueil;  
Mon esprit en conçoit une mâle assurance:

and a little farther, l. 485:

La solide vertu dont je fais vanité  
N'admet point de faiblesse avec sa fermeté.

In his last speech, he says (l. 1579):

Si bien que pour laisser une illustre mémoire,  
La mort seule aujourd'hui peut conserver ma gloire.

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1. l. 1628.





The extreme contrast between Horace and Curiace is nowhere better shown than in their dialogue after they know that they have been chosen as champions. Horace is speaking, l. 499:

Avec une allégresse aussi pleine et sincère  
Que j'épousai la soeur, je combattrai le frère;  
Et pour trancher enfin ces discours superflus,  
Albe vous a nommé, je ne vous connais plus.

To which Curiace replies:

Je vous connois encore, et c'est ce qui me tue;  
Mais cette âpre vertu ne m'étoit pas connue;  
Comme notre malheur elle est au plus haut point:  
Souffrez que je l'admire et ne l'imite point.

Curiace is the raisonneur of the play, the foil to Horace. He represents the thought of the audience, which is the foil to Corneille. In the last of these lines Corneille has given the keynote of the play: admiration of character, to which we shall return in speaking of Katharsis. Our next question is as to Camille and Sabine. Which is the heroine? In the first three acts, Sabine is far more prominent than Camille; but from the beginning of Act IV, Camille comes forward and Sabine is lost sight of until her very weak appearance in the last scene. The prophecy of the oracle given to Camille early in the play finds its true meaning in the very last lines:

Puisqu'en un même jour l'ardeur d'un même zèle  
Achève le destin de son amant et d'elle,  
Je veux qu'un même jour, témoin de leurs deux morts,  
En un même tombeau voie enfermer leurs corps.

Since the play ends with Camille in the foreground, we are justified in considering her the heroine. Is she an Aristotelian character? She is 'true to type' for she remains throughout the





play a woman, and at no time assumes a valorous attitude. She is consistent throughout in her love for Curiace. When that love is sacrificed, she sacrifices life also. Nowhere, like Chimène, does she pretend, in her own mind, nor in the public eye, to prefer her family duty to her love for Curiace. Cf. l. 1195 ff.:

Oui, je lui ferai voir, par d'infailibles marques,  
Qu'un véritable amour brave la main des Parques.

and l. 1249 ff.:

...Préparons-nous à montrer constamment  
Ce que doit une amante à la mort d'un amant.

Camille is throughly Aristotelian, during the entire play, and she comes to a tragic end. As we hinted in the chapter on the Cid, Camille is the only Aristotelian heroine in Corneille's tragedies.

### KATHARSIS

With this brief study of the characters, let us pass on to the question of Katharsis. Since we have determined that Horace is not Aristotelian, we know then, ipso facto, that he will not call forth pity and fear. And having seen that Camille is Aristotelian, we shall expect her to arouse our pity and fear. Such is indeed the case. Horace never once allows anyone to feel pity or fear for him; it is an insult to his 'vertu'. (l. 398 ff.):

Quoi! vous me pleureriez mourant pour mon pays!  
Pour un coeur généreux ce trépas a des charmes;  
La gloire qui le suit ne souffre point de larmes.

And l. 1350:

Et ne m'accable point d'une indigne pitié.





What then is the emotion we feel for Horace? It is Admiration for his invincible Patriotism. Up to the end we might have felt both pity and terror, but not when Horace stands ever triumphant. Early in the play (1) the situation is presented as both pitiful and horrible, in the lines already quoted:

A voir de tels amis, des personnes si proches,  
Venir pour leur patrie aux mortelles approches,  
L'un s'ement de pitié, l'autre est saisi d'horreur,  
L'autre d'un si grand zèle admire la fureur;  
Tel porte jusqu'aux cieux leur vertu sans égale.

But here already Corneille strikes the keynote of Admiration, which is the purpose he set himself in the play. Although there is a strong tinge of the ethical in making of Admiration the central theme of the tragedy, Corneille's primary interest was aesthetic: he sought to give pleasure by portraying an admirable character. The Katharsis cannot be fully Aristotelian, granted such a hero. Horace, we have seen, was an Aristotelian character until the final 'dénouement' when he comes to a triumphant end, the audience ceases to feel fear or pity for him, and on the other hand, he thus loses all Aristotelian qualities. Camille does arouse our pity, and we fear for her happiness. The word plaindre is often used in speaking of her situation, and at the end the king says, (l. 1777):

Je la plains .....

Thus we may say that the play is more than half tragic, since the development of the plot is Aristotelian and the heroine is Aris-

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1. Ll. 783 ff.





totelian. It is only in the final 'dénouement' that Camille failed to meet the critics' approval. Horace represents a distinct advance in Corneille's understanding of the Aristotelian requirements. But since Corneille's purpose was to present Horace as an invincible hero, and to arouse our admiration, we must confess that Corneille could not produce the Aristotelian Katharsis. He, however, complied with a pseudo-Aristotelian doctrine, by evoking Minturno's theory of Admiration, which fitted so perfectly Corneille's romanesque plot.

### UNITIES

The treatment of the Unities in Horace is far less complicated than in the Cid. The subject was less romanesque, and less burdened with epic coloring and incident. The Unities of Time and Place offer the least difficulty, and we shall dispose of them first. Horace is a thoroughly psychological drama, and hence needs no great amount of time, as would one dependent upon exterior events. What external action there is, is not presented to the spectators; nevertheless, time must be left for its enactment. Throughout, Corneille bears in mind that the action must be terminated in twenty-four hours. We are constantly reminded that it is the events of but one single day which are taking place before our eyes. As early as ll. 329, 330, we find definite mention of time:

Dans deux heures au plus, par un commun accord,  
Le sort de nos guerriers réglera notre sort.

So in l. 672:

Et me laisse achever cette grande journée





and ll. 867, 869:

Et que nous n'emploierons la fin de la journée  
Qu'aux doux préparatifs d'un heureux hymenée,

and strikingly in l. 1049:

Qu'avant ce jour fini.....

l. 1151 suggests something beyond, but our tragedy is ended before we get there:

Et remet à demain la pompe qu'il prépare.

Lines 1203 ff. seem almost to have been meant to impress on our minds that so many and so great events are all included in one day:

En vit-on jamais un(1) dont les rudes traverses  
Prissent en moins de rien, tant de faces diverses,  
Vit-on jamais une âme en un jour plus atteinte  
De joie de douleur, d'espérance et de crainte?

But these lines are not actually forced. The day indeed has seen many changes of fortune, but it so happens that Horace offered Corneille the one case in a thousand, where many reversals did actually take place in one day. There is no such straining as in the Cid, where the original had more than a year's time, which Corneille compressed to twenty-four hours. The closing lines of Horace strike again the key-note of time.(2) Unity of Time is strictly observed in this play, but this had been made possible to Corneille only through the happy circumstance of the historical authenticity of the action. The extraordinary nature of the action is indeed made more plausible by the limited time in which it is

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1. Un jour.

2. Already quoted. Cf. supra, p. 126.





made to occur, for with more time for deliberation, it would be far less credible that the various characters would go to such extreme ends. In this play, then, Unity of Time is a distinct asset, and is more natural than in the Cid.

Let us examine now, briefly, the Unity of Place. The stage directions read as follows: "La scène est à Rome, dans une salle de la maison d'Horace." This is an approach to the 'palais à volonté' which Corneille advocated somewhat later in his Examen and Discours, and which was fully established at the time of Racine. Unity of Place is adhered to without harm to Verisimilitude except possibly at one point in Act V. The trial of Horace, which in Livy is conducted by the Duumviri in the public square, takes place in the house of the elder Horace by the king alone. But this difficulty can be explained away, by the fact that the king did not come for the purpose of judging Horace. Indeed, he knew nothing of the murder of Camille, and he was forced, very reluctantly, to act as judge. Although the truth of history is disregarded, it does not appear that verisimilitude is equally lacking. On the whole, the truth of history, that is, the legendary history of Livy, is followed, and Unity of Place is maintained without sacrificing 'vraisemblance'. The handling of place in this play is important, for it is the first time in Corneille's plays that the multiplex scenery has disappeared, supplanted by a one-room setting of general character. As we have said of the Unity of Time, the Unity of Place has also a particular value in Horace; because of it,





Corneille was not free to present the battle-array, and he was thus led to present only the psychological actions which are by far the more interesting.

Unity of Action will hold our attention a little longer, and we shall need to develop the consideration of it in somewhat greater detail. Let us first follow the principal actions of the play. The declaration of war, the choosing of the champions, the combat, Rome's victory, the murder of Camille, and the absolution of Horace from the main action. We must next judge whether these actions grow out of one another, or are the result of the characters. If we except the primary "données" of the play, i.e., the declaration of war and the choosing of the champions, which are the cornerstones upon which we are to build, we can say that the resulting action is, indeed, dependent upon the characters. This will be developed more clearly later in connection with the 'dénouement'. For the moment, let us consider whether the action is completed. Is the action brought to a real conclusion in Horace? Certainly Camille's lot is settled and Horace is crowned with a lasting glory, so we may conclude that the tragedy is completed. But the question as to whether the play was not completed after the Roman victory, is a point which concerns Unity of Action, quite as much as plot. Since, however, we have considered this in an earlier paragraph, we may be permitted to repeat here only our conclusions, namely, that the outcome of the battle was not the subject of the play for Corneille, and therefore the tragedy is not ended there. If the subject is the clash of two opposing





wills, as we have said, is there anything in the play irrelevant to its development? In answer, we may quote Petit de Julleville:(1) "Camille livrerait tout, même la patrie, pour sauver la vie de l'amant. Horace immolerait tout, même le sang des siens, à la gloire de Rome. Entre ces deux passions absolues, sans merci, sans remords, la lutte est inévitable: elle est contenue et suspendue pendant trois actes par les péripéties habilement ménagées du combat fratricide; elle éclate au quatrième quand le vainqueur apparaît, triomphant, aux yeux de sa soeur désespérée. Camille insulte Horace, il l'écoute avec dédain, mais sans fureur; Camille outrage Rome, et Horace la tue. Elle tombe, et avec elle tombe l'amour vaincu, immolé au patriotisme. Et le cinquième acte est monotone et froid, mais non pas inutile, comme on l'a dit à tort; car il aboutit Horace." What an admirable outline of the play, and how clearly it shows the unity of the whole! Yet this is perhaps the viewpoint of modern criticism, and it is more probable that Aristotle would have agreed with Corneille in seeing a double peril to Horace, of which the second was in nowise a case of 'propter hoc' but simply of 'post hoc'.

We have still left the consideration of the character of Sabine. We have seen that her role was sacrificed to that of Camille, but must we say that Sabine is as unnecessary to the action as the Infanta was in the Cid? Since Corneille made Sabine the wife of Horace, she had a very real interest in all the action of the play, whereas the love of the Infanta for Rodrigue was not -----  
 1. Morceaux Choisis, pp. 236, 237.





sufficiently developed to make a strong bond of sympathy. Although the role of Sabine is much larger in Horace than the role of the Infanta, yet it would seem that her chief function is to give symmetry to the play, just as the Infanta had done in the Cid. The modern critic is willing to admit that Sabine has more place in the tragedy than the Infanta in the Cid, yet it cannot be denied that the role is dramatically weak. In what must have been a conscious effort to make the role of Sabine a more integral part of Horace than that of the Infanta had been in the Cid, Corneille bordered on the other extreme, and developed the role too far for a secondary personage, none of whose actions affect the turn of the tragedy.

Our conclusion as to the Unities is now easy. From the Aristotelian point of view, Unity of Action is impaired by the double peril, although both perils work together towards the final 'dénouement', which is the triumph of Patriotism over Family. The time of the action is limited to the twenty-four hours; and the place is a single room.

In Horace, Corneille attained to the model he sought: a technically perfect classic tragedy. It is the romanesque nature of the plot and the happy ending of the hero which prevent Horace from being a faultless tragedy like Racine's Andromaque or Phèdre. We have already said in our discussion of psychological action in the preceding chapter, that Racine's dramatic method, of choosing simple plots with unhappy outcomes, made him essentially Aristotelian. And we must recall again how much Racine was influenced by his Jansenistic training, which taught him the weak-





ness of the Human Will, and also by the fatalistic doctrines of the Greeks which he learned at Port-Royal. Corneille's whole psychology was opposed to these doctrines, and it would have been impossible for Corneille to portray the defeat of the Human Will. The fact that in Horace, Corneille constructed a tragedy with all the qualifications of an Aristotelian play, including the elements of the plot, and the characters of his protagonists, to which he added the pseudo-Aristotelian Unities, this fact should, therefore, receive keen appreciation from modern criticism. Horace is "the first great tragedy in the French manner - firstly, it portrays in a narrow compass, a deep moral struggle; secondly, it conforms strictly to the rule of the three unities." (1) Lanson considers Horace the triumph of Tragedy, for it "rompt avec le roman, le précieux, l'Espagne, et ramène à l'antique." (2)

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1. Nitze and Galpin, op. cit., p. 350.

2. Histoire, p. 427.





## CHAPTER VII - CINNA

Cinna ou La Clémence d'Auguste is a sister-play to Horace, and inseparable from it. Cinna immediately followed Horace in 1640, (1) and met with a tremendous success. Indeed, Cinna enjoyed during Corneille's lifetime a reputation close to that of the Cid. We need not concern ourselves with the details of this first presentation, but begin immediately the examination of the elements of the play and their treatment.

Corneille again chose a subject from Roman history, using as his text a passage from Seneca, as in Horace he had modelled his play on certain chapters from Livy. The subject of Cinna was well adapted to the public of 1640, for it is a presentation of public policy, i.e., a political subject, in a universal aspect. Whether or not we accept the theory that Corneille was secretly pleading in behalf of his compatriots at

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1. The Frères Parfaict give 1639 as the date of Cinna, but this is manifestly incorrect, since we know that Cinna was posterior to Horace, which was played in 1640. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, 364, 365.





Rouen (1), with the hope that Richelieu would follow the example of magnanimity, we must at all events recognize that the 'lesson of Empire' was 'de circonstance.'

Like the Cid and Horace, again Cinna is also a psychological drama, and even more so than the first two. There is considerable external action in the background, but the actors in the conspiracy never appear, and all their plans are merely related. In Aristotelian terms, the plot is complex, having several reversals of fortune. In the first three scenes of Act I, we are told the necessary antecedents of the plan and the arrangements for the conspiracy. Scene IV brings a sharp reversal when it appears that Augustus has discovered the conspiracy. This is reversed again in favor of Cinna and Maxime at the opening of Act II when Augustus speaks so frankly to his confidants. The first scene brings another reversal, not of situation, but of character, in Cinna and Maxime, who utter so blandly such false advice. From conspirators this should not surprise, nor would it disconcert, the audience, were it not that Augustus has already in a few lines, captivated one's sympathy by his sincere self revela-

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, III, 361-363. Cf. also article by G. L. van Reesbroeck in Modern Philology, (1922), pp. 1-17, entitled: "Corneille's 'Cinna' and the 'Conspiration des Dames.'" In this article a new and far more convincing theory is presented as to the historical background of Cinna. Professor van Reesbroeck would see in the Roman conspiracy an idealized picture of the conspiracy led by Madame de Chevreuse, through the instrumentation of the Comte de Chalais, against Richelieu himself.





tion. (1) Act III introduces the first important reversal of fortune, when Maxime deliberates (sc. 1) as to disclosing the conspiracy to the Emperor. His decision is not acted upon until Act IV, sc. 1, when Euphorbe reveals the facts to Augustus. Act IV, sc. 2 heightens our sympathetic admiration for Augustus, although we do not here foresee the 'dénouement'. Sc. 3 is further preparation, with the counsel of Livie, for the final outcome. Sc. 4 continues good fortune with the report, though false, of Maxime's death, and Emilie's confidence that her 'vertu' will carry her through to a glorious death, as an accomplice in the conspiracy. Sc. 5 is the episode of Maxime's attempt to abduct Emilie. Its value to the plot is to show Maxime's miserable character, and to portray Emilie's steadfastness of purpose. This scene rather increases our sympathy with the cold Emilie. Sc. 6 further degrades the character of Maxime who blames his ill success and consequent disgrace on Euphorbe, a cringing freedman. Act V opens with the big scene between Augustus and Cinna. Here the Emperor is still undecided as to the punishment he will deal out to Cinna, but it is apparent that the thought of clemency has not yet suggested itself. This dialogue is interrupted by the sudden entrance of Livie and Emilie (sc. 2) when Emilie avows her share in the plot against the Emperor's life. At the end of this scene, Augustus intends to measure the punishment by the horror of the

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1. This matter will be discussed further under characters.





crime: (ll. 1661, 1662)

Et, que tout l'univers, sachant ce qui m'anime,  
S'étonne du supplice aussi bien que du crime.

The third scene brings Maxime before the Emperor, and he confesses his mean jealousy and the triple treachery to his Emperor, his friend, and his lady. Realizing now that he cannot count even on those who seem his best friends, Auguste sees the light and recognizes that his only hope is clemency. (1) Ll. 1696 ff. form the 'dénouement':

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers;  
Je le suis, je veux l'être, O siècle, ô mémoire,  
Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire!  
Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux  
De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu'à vous.  
Soyons amis, Cinna, <sup>c'est</sup> moi qui t'en convie:

After redoubling his gifts to Cinna, and pardoning all the conspirators and their leaders, the play ends with the prophetic words of Livie, that by this deed of clemency, Auguste has won security for himself for all time together with the affection of the Roman people.

Such then is the plot we have to consider. We notice immediately two elements which are not Aristotelian, i.e., which Aristotle condemns for the perfect tragedy. The reversal of fortune is of the fourth, or poorest type in Aristotle's order: the case where a character intends to kill another with full knowledge of the identity, and then does not kill. This could not be Aristotelian, since to withdraw from a project of killing would

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1. Cf. Hermani, Act IV, in which Charlemagne gives the same lesson of clemency to Charles Quint - The last lines of the Act read: "je t'ai crié: "Par où faut-il que je commence?" "Et tu m'as répondu? "Mon fils, par la clémence!"





result either from cowardice which would not befit a tragic hero, or from moral restraint, which would keep the character from having the 'tragic flaw', so necessary to the perfect protagonist of Tragedy. We can foresee from this some of our conclusions in regard to character, but let us leave that discussion to its proper time and place. The second un-Aristotelian quality in this plot is the happy ending. In Horace, we found a 'dénouement' which to a certain extent at least, was tragic, since Camille was killed. Here, however, every one is pardoned, even to Maxime and Euphorbe, and the Emperor has conquered himself which is more than all (l. 1696):

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers.

and ll. 1779, 1780:

Et que vos conjurés entendent publier  
Qu'Auguste a tout appris et veut tout oublier.

Yet the plot has many Aristotelian requirements: it deals with well-known and illustrious personages taken from Roman history. The internal psychological struggle is developed clearly and skilfully. The 'dénouement' is psychological, not external, and has been motivated throughout the play, at least from the first appearance of Auguste, when he shows his great concern for the welfare of the state. The action in Cinna is less complicated than in Horace, just as Horace marked a great advance over the Cid. (1)

As in the Cid and Horace, Corneille was here again bound

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1. Yet there are in Cinna some suggestions of the romanesque action of Corneille's later period. Cf. the planned abduction and the false suicide.





by the historical 'dénouement'. To have made of this plot an Aristotelian tragedy, it would have been necessary for the conspirators to have killed Augustus, and for Cinna to have perished in remorse. It is very interesting to find the following passage, in which Corneille has outlined what would have made a thoroughly Aristotelian 'dénouement' (ll. 1061 ff.) Cinna is speaking:

Vous le voulez...j'y cours, ma parole est donnée;  
 Mais ma main, aussitôt contre mon sein tournée,  
 Aux mânes d'un tel prince immolant votre amant,  
 A mon crime forcé joindra mon châtement,  
 Et par cette action dans l'autre confondue,  
 Recouvrera ma gloire aussitôt que perdue.

But such was not the subject Corneille proposed to treat. We may repeat here what has already been said, and what is increasingly true of the later plays: Corneille deliberately chose subjects which did not have an Aristotelian 'dénouement', for those were the stories of unconquerable heroism.

One problem in connection with Cinna has been presented by Voltaire and all critics since: why the double title, "Cinna ou La Clémence d'Auguste"? Has the play a single hero, and which is he, Cinna or Auguste? The contemporaries of Corneille, including Balzac, who scarcely mentions Auguste, considered Cinna the hero of the play, as would be logical from the title. They would analyze the plot as follows: Cinna conspires against Augustus; Cinna's conspiracy is discovered; Cinna is pardoned, thus Cinna is maintained in the preeminent position. The modern critic, however, would find the hero in Augustus and outline the plot in





this manner: Augustus is threatened by a conspiracy; Augustus discovers the conspiracy, and pardons the conspirators. It is an interesting 'coup de main' which thus shifts the whole accent of the play. And it is our problem to determine, if possible, which of these interpretations is correct. If one considers the first act alone, without relation to the succeeding circumstances, it seems evident that the spectator's sympathies are entirely with Cinna and the conspirators, against the Emperor. Augustus is described by Cinna in terms which admit of no misunderstanding (ll. 166 ff.):

Et son salut dépend de la perte d'un homme,  
Si l'on doit le nom d'homme à qui n'a rien d'humain,  
A ce tigre altéré de tout le sang romain.

Yet early in Act I, there is one mention of the generosity of Augustus towards Emilie (ll. 63, 64):

Auguste chaque jour, à force de bienfaits,  
Semble assez réparer les maux qu'il vous a faits.

That these 'bienfaits' are conscious and willed on the part of Augustus is well shown in ll. 637 ff.:

Pour épouse, Cinna, je vous donne Emilie:  
Vous savez qu'elle tient la place de Julie,  
Et que si nos malheurs et la nécessité  
M'ont fait traiter son père avec sévérité,  
Mon épargne depuis en sa faveur ouverte  
Doit avoir adouci l'aigreur de cette perte.

In the last Act (sc. 2), both the Emperor and Livie reproach Emilie with her ingratitude. The couplet quoted above (ll. 63, 64) must be regarded as the only true note to the character of Augustus in Act I, and it alone would seem to justify Emile Faguet's





position (1), that Corneille fully prepared the audience for the preeminent position of Augustus. Faguet says that the spectator who allows his sympathy to go with Cinna in Act I, is mistaken, and if he continues this false interpretation in Act II, he is entirely wrong, and the author should not be blamed for the errors of the public. Indeed, after the first appearance of the Emperor, our attention and interest are shifted to him entirely, and remain with him until the end of the play. Augustus is first presented as having the interests of Rome and the welfare of the state at heart. Nowhere does he act or speak in such a way as to justify the conspiracy. He greets Cinna and Maxime as "mes chers amis" (l. 393) and continues in ll. 399, 400:

Traitez-moi comme ami, non comme souverain,  
Rome, Auguste, l'Etat, tout est en votre main,

an attitude which is again echoed in ll. 1123, 1124:

Reprenez le pouvoir que vous m'avez commis,  
Si donnant des sujets, il ôte les amis.

The high point is reached with the words of Augustus in ll. 621 ff.:

N'en délibérons plus, cette pitié l'emporte.  
Mon repos m'est bien cher, mais Rome est la plus forte;  
Et quelque grand malheur qui m'en puisse arriver,  
Je consens à me perdre afin de la sauver.

This position is never reversed during the play, and only reaches its culmination in ll. 1696 ff., already quoted. Augustus is without any doubt presented as the 'héros généreux' of the tragedy (2).

1. En lisant Corneille, p. 132.

2. Corneille made it quite clear in the Dédicace to Montoron that Auguste was the hero. Cf. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, pp. 370, 371.





As one critic has expressed it (1): "Ne semble-t-il pas que le poète voyait d'abord en eux (the conspirators) les héros de sa pièce, mais que, contraint par le développement logique des caractères et la tyrannie des situations, voyant se dresser devant lui un Auguste plus grand encore qu'il ne l'avait rêvé, vaincu, lui aussi, par ce héros nouveau que son imagination vient d'enfanter tout d'une pièce (2), il se jette en même temps qu'eux, aux pieds de l'empereur, pour se faire pardonner de l'avoir un instant méconnu?" There can be no doubt but that Augustus is the hero in Corneille's mind, and all misapprehension caused by Act I is adequately wiped away by the words of Livie, beginning l. 1609:

Tous ces crimes d'Etat qu'on fait pour la couronne,  
Le ciel nous en absout alors qu'il nous la donne,  
Et dans le sacré rang où sa faveur l'a mis,  
Le passé devient juste et l'avenir permis.

This passage is important, not only as the expression of Corneille's belief in the Divine Right of kings, but more specifically as indicating his entire sympathy with Augustus, whom he presents to us as his hero. If, then, Corneille recognized that through more than three acts, Augustus was the hero of the play, and that it is on that note that the play is to end, what prevented him from changing the title to simply "La Clémence d'Auguste", or better still,

"Auguste"? The first of these, "La Clémence d'Auguste" is a longer

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1. Hémon, Félix: Oeuvres de Corneille, II, p. 19.

2. It is to be noted that Corneille quite transformed the Augustus of history, and made of him a majestic, heroic figure. Cf. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, pp. 373, 374.





title and is therefore not as good as a one-word title. Corneille's practice was always to use a one-word title for his plays with a sub-title where it seemed necessary. "Cinna" alone would be inexact and would not mean much to the audience. "Auguste", on the other hand, would be too vague, since the Emperor's life offered many possible subjects for tragedy. But the fact still remains that there exists a very real dramatic weakness which Corneille himself felt, but was unable to obviate.

The characters of Cinna also present certain difficulties. If we are to consider Augustus the hero, have we an Aristotelian hero? To this end, Augustus lacks the 'hamartia' or fatal flaw. He should have had Cinna killed and the conspirators exiled, just as Horace killed Camille; and in addition, he should have repented of the deed as soon as done. On the contrary Augustus rises in our esteem from his first appearance, and ends in a superhuman triumph over himself. It is clear that the Emperor's clemency is due to pride more than to inherent goodness, and if he conquers himself, it is to primarily convince himself of his own greatness. That this was Corneille's conception of this role is manifest from lines already quoted, to which may be added l. 1713, addressed to Emilie:

Apprends sur mon exemple à vaincre ta colère.

If we take Cinna as the hero of the play in accordance with the title, what have we? A vacillating, inconsistent character, alternately dominated by love and by a sense of duty and gratitude towards the Emperor. His love for Emilie is the only reliev-





ing feature in his odious role. All along we are conscious that he is serving his mistress and not the cause of Roman freedom.(1) But this love itself is weak and not impelling. To have made a true tragedy, Cinna would have had to kill Augustus, as Orestes killed Pyrrhus, and commit suicide afterwards. It is too evident that Corneille was interested in the political aspect of the subject, and included the love element only in deference to the taste of his day. Had Corneille portrayed this love as sufficiently strong to motivate the conspiracy, Cinna's role would have been far more honorable, but Corneille's manifest lack of interest in the love element detracts from Cinna's character, and leaves him as a wholly unsympathetic figure. Cinna errs against another Aristotelian precept in his inconsistency, although here he is like Chimene in the Cid, 'consistently inconsistent'. This quality is, however, less excusable in a man than in a woman, and is entirely unbefitting the chief protagonist of a Tragedy. There should be no doubt that Corneille never intended Cinna for his hero, when we read such lines as the following, put in the mouth of the Emperor (2)

Si jusques à ce point son sort(3) est déplorable,  
Que tu sois après moi le plus considérable.

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Ta fortune est bien haut, tu peux ce que tu veux;  
Mais tu ferois pitié même à ceux qu'elle irrite,  
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1. Cf. such lines as 150, 260, 321, 717 ff., 744 ff., 842 ff.
2. Ll. 1513 ff.
3. That of Rome





Si je t'abandonnois à ton peu de mérite.

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Conte-moi tes vertus, tes glorieux travaux,  
Les rares qualités par où tu m'as dû plaire,  
Et tout ce qui t'élève au-dessus du vulgaire.

These and similar lines make us realize that Cinna has, in fact, shown no strength, no remarkable qualities, and is not worthy of the highest place in a tragedy,--surely not in a Cornelian tragedy. Thus neither Augustus nor Cinna would prove to be an Aristotelian hero: the one is too strong, the other too weak.

Emilie has been well characterized as "une belle furie" by Guez de Balzac, an epithet which has remained to our time. She is the exaggeration of Chimène. Already in the Cid, Corneille had portrayed the type of valorous woman, who followed duty and sacrificed love; Emilie is of the second generation, in whom the trait is strengthened. Whereas Chimène did love Rodrigue profoundly, and it cost her a very real effort to sacrifice this love, Emilie's sole thought in her love for Cinna seems to be that it is a means to her one end: Vengeance.(1) Cf. l. 1261 ff., where she says to Cinna as she sends him off to what she expects will be death:

Je crains point de succès qui souille ta mémoire;  
Le bon et le mauvais sont égaux pour ta gloire;  
Et dans un tel dessein, le manque de bonheur  
Met en péril ta vie, et non pas ton honneur.

Strange language for a fiancée! This is but poorly counter-

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1. Not only would this be in keeping with Corneille's conception of character, but also, it fits the historical background, if we are to see in Emilie the intriguing Madame de Chevreuse. Cf. van Roosbroeck's discussion, loc. cit., pp. 15-17.





balanced a few verses later by the words:

Mais ne perds pas le soin de conserver ta vie;  
Souviens-toi du beau feu dont nous sommes épris,  
Qu'aussi bien que la gloire Emilie est ton prix.

ll. 329 ff. sound the same note:

Porte, porte chez lui cette mâle assurance,  
Digne de notre amour, digne de ta naissance;  
Meurs, s'il y faut mourir, en citoyen romain,  
Et par un beau trépas, couronne un beau dessein.

Corneille is always solicitous of 'la dignité romaine' whether represented by Emilie, or by Auguste himself. When the weak and merely human Cinna exclaims:

Vous faites des vertus au gré de votre haine,

the defiant Emilie retorts:

Je me fais des vertus dignes d'une Romaine.

Emilie is the feminine Horace, and like him, she is capable of avenging herself (ll. 1017, 1018):

Sans emprunter ta main pour servir ma colère,  
Je saurai bien venger mon pays et mon père.

Unlike Chimène, who succumbed under the wiles of the king to test her love, Emilie never allows herself to be crushed (ll. 1297 ff.):

Je vous entends, grands Dieux! vos lentes que j'adore  
Ne peuvent consentir que je me deshonne;  
Et ne me permettant soupirs, sanglots, ni pleurs,  
Soutiennent ma vertu contre de tels malheurs.

Or again, ll. 1373, 1374:

La porte m'a surprise, et ne m'a point troublée;  
Mon noble désespoir ne m'a point aveuglée.

But as we saw in the outline of the play, Emilie does not have her desire fulfilled, she is not avenged. As in the Cid, events take an unexpected turn, and she finally accepts





Cinna, not for any excess of valor or virtue on his part, but on account of the magnanimity of Augustus. Throughout the play, the role of Emilie parallels that of Chimène, and just as we determined that Chimène was not Aristotelien, not being 'vraisemblable', so we may reach the same conclusion for Emilie, in whom the 'invraisemblance' is carried to an even greater degree. Emilie chose from the first to sacrifice Love to Vengeance, when her grievance was far more distant than was the murder of Don Gomes which was immediately present to the mind of Chimène.

If we glance back for a moment on the characters of Horace, we shall remember that Horace was, until the end, a good Aristotelian character; Camille remained such throughout. In Cinna, on the other hand, not one of the characters can be called Aristotelian, neither Augustus, Cinna, nor Emilie. From this point of view, at least, Horace is more Aristotelian than Cinna.

In analyzing the nature of the Katharsis, we shall not be surprised to find that Pity and Fear are alike missing. We do not fear for Augustus after the first act; nor do we fear for Cinna, since any punishment would be merited; nor for Emilie who so deliberately brought trouble upon herself. Still more, there is no place for Pity in any of these three roles. Admiration of character is again the basis of the play, and it is this fact which, more than all else, leads one to recognize in Augustus the hero. Our admiration of Augustus differs essentially from that which we felt for





Horace. In the Emperor we admire clemency, magnanimity, a virtue little known in the world perhaps, but which should be admired whenever found. In Horace, on the other hand, we admired Patriotism, but an exaggerated Patriotism that led Horace to kill his own sister. Such a virtue one cannot admire unguardedly, for it has the weakness of its quality. And therein, exactly, lay its Aristotelianism, for it is more natural, more human, more universal, that a man should carry his qualities, both good and bad, to excess. While Corneille had before him the example of Horace in writing Cinna, he did not attain to the same perfection.

The Unities are handled with even more success than in Horace, although there is considerable convention. Unity of Action is necessarily weakened by the shift of interest at the end of Act I, already indicated in our discussion of plot. The conspiracy remains throughout the principal action, and the episode of Maxime's attempt to abduct Emilie is sufficiently bound to the main action, since it is because of this love that the conspiracy is disclosed to the Emperor. There is then Unity of Action, although somewhat impaired by the shift of interest.

Unity of Time gives very little trouble in this play. There are but few actual mentions of the time element, and there is no straining of incident. The action is begun at the crisis, and all preceding events are narrated briefly but completely. There is less narration necessary in Cinna than had been used in Horace; during the play itself, there





is no action of the conspirators. Only such time is needed as may be necessary for the interview in the morning between the Emperor, Cinna and Maxime, with a brief interval between this and the disclosure of the plot, during which Cinna has confided his love to Maxime. The pardon of the Emperor follows immediately upon the discovery of the conspiracy. The actual references to time in the text of the play are far fewer than in Horace, and also less definite. In ll. 138, 139, aujourd'hui is thrice repeated; in l. 163, voici le jour heureux sets the time for the whole action. In l. 250, there occurs the frequent trick of referring to a demain which never comes in the action. By l. 1113 we are in the night, and in l. 2259 the action is hurried with "nous perdons temps". L. 1401 has the familiar expression: "un même jour", followed two lines later by "en un jour". Most of these mentions of time are now old tricks to Corneille; he handles them more deftly here than in the preceding plays. Cinna has undoubtedly the most perfect Unity of Time we have yet found; Corneille has definitely mastered this point of technique.

Unity of Place gives rise to some difficulties. Corneille seems to have used for Cinna a simplified form of the multiple scenery, by which he could have contiguous apartments for the Emperor and for Emilie. Verisimilitude required that there be these two distinct apartments, for it would not be plausible that Cinna's account to Emilie of the plans for the conspiracy (Act I, sc.3) take place in the





same room in which Augustus is so soon to take counsel with Cinna and Maxime (Act II, sc. 1). In the second Act, it was hardly the part of discretion to have Cinna and Maxime discuss their plans while still in the counsel-room of the Emperor. The interview with Augustus takes place in the palace, and if no change is indicated, the audience continues with the same scene in mind. Corneille felt that this was unsatisfactory, for in l. 704 we find one of the rare mentions of place:

Ami, dans ce palais on peut nous écouter,  
Et nous parlons peut-être avec trop d'imprudence  
Dans un lieu si mal propre à notre confiance:  
Sortons: qu'en sûreté j'examine avec vous,  
Pour en venir à bout, les moyens les plus doux.

But this comes only at the close of the scene, and does not obviate the difficulty. Again in Act IV, it is not 'vraisemblable' that the same room should be used for scenes 1 and 5. In the first of these scenes, Euphorbe makes the false report to the Emperor of Maxime's death, and in the second, Maxime himself appears before Emilie. But in reality, these considerations weighed very lightly upon the mind of Corneille, whose thoughts were all intent upon the internal drama, and the real place of the action was for him of no importance. It was, in fact, "tout idéal", and the author depended upon the interest of the action to hold the spectator's attention closely enough so that no consideration of time or place would enter his mind. And in fact, Cinna was later performed with the indefinite 'palais à volonté' setting, which we have met with already in Horace, and which





became the accepted setting for the classical stage. It can only be with reference to this later method of presentation that d'Aubignac makes the following comment (1): "Je n'ai jamais pu bien concevoir comment Monsieur Corneille peut faire qu'en un même lieu Cinna conte à Emilie tout l'ordre et toutes les circonstances d'une grande conspiration contre Auguste, et qu'Auguste y tienne un conseil de confidence avec ses deux favoris?" Since in actual fact, more than one locality is necessary for the strict observance of 'vraisemblance' in the play, Cinna falls short of the pseudo-Aristotelian requirement of Unity of Place. But since the indefinite 'room of a palace' was the accepted convention for place, we should recognize that Corneille fulfilled the requirements and Cinna has what was then interpreted as Unity of Place.

Looking back over our discussion of the play, in how far does it meet the fundamental requirement of Verisimilitude? There are those who think that the clemency of Augustus is not probable or true to life, after his bloody struggle to gain the Empire. Yet if we consider that clemency was the direct result of pride, and a sense of his own greatness, we can understand this deed as natural and 'vraisemblable'. In this, as so often, Corneille clung to the historical legend, without any great concern as to whether the action was probable or not. This, as we saw in the Cid and in Horace, led

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(1) La Pratique du Théâtre, Paris, 1657. Quoted in Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, p. 398.





to the un-Aristotelian 'dénouement', since Corneille was bound by the facts of history. It is true that all the characters, swung by Augustus himself, made a sudden 'volte-face' at the end of the tragedy, which seems more like a theatrical trick than good psychology. Corneille's whole interest was in the greatness of his hero Augustus, and he disposed of the other characters without much apparent thought. It is on this basis that the statement of Lemaître (1) finds its justification: "Avec Cinna, déjà, commencent les éclatantes et froides erreurs cornéliennes". His whole interest is shifted now from the situation, the characters, and the setting, to the abstract idea. It is entirely psychological that "La Clémence d'Auguste" should stand in the title of the play, for that is the thought uppermost in Corneille's mind. The inevitable result of this abstraction was that the situations and the characters lacked psychology, for the author did not visualize either as he wrote. Cinna, although usually grouped with Horace on account of the comparative simplicity of its plot, is far closer to Pompée in its psychology, and is, if not the beginning, at least the forerunner of the later plays.

After this discussion of Cinna, it may seem strange that it met with such success, and was ranked among the masterpieces of Corneille. This is undoubtedly to be explained, in large measure, by the type of audience before whom the play was given. The men (and women, indeed) of 1640 were

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1. Petit de Julleville, Hist. de la Langue et de la Litt. Fr., IV, 292.





intensely interested in the political aspect of life--not that they had any voice in it, but on that very account, their interest in it was keener and sought an outlet. Thus the subject of Cinna seemed the voicing of a judgment on Louis XIII and Richelieu. And in a more general way, the generation of 1640 was an ardent admirer of heroes and individual prowess; it was the period of 'le grand Condé' and 'les Frondeurs'.(1) Just as Horace had pleased with his 'beau geste', though violent, so Auguste was well calculated to arouse the hearty admiration and applause of the same audiences. The beauty of the verses and their sheer eloquence carried the day, and the audience had no thought for psychology or verisimilitude.

We must not forget that in seeking out the Aristotelian elements in Corneille's tragedies, we are joining the ranks of Chapelain and the Academicians, authors of the Sentimens, rather than the vast audiences who never stinted their praises of the Cid, of Horace, and of Cinna. The standards by which the two groups judged the plays are entirely different, and when we say that Cinna lacks practically all Aristotelian qualities, and announces Corneille's later manner, we are in nowise reversing the judgment of the ages, for in the light of mature criticism, Cinna has not continued to rank as high as the Cid and Horace; its lack of Verisimilitude (the basic Aristotelian requirement), has kept it from the highest ranks.

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1. Petit de Julleville, Morceaux Choisis, pp. 368, 369.





## CHAPTER VIII - POLYEUCTE

There was again a considerable interval between Cinna and the next play, Polyeucte, which did not appear until the end of 1641, or the first months of 1642. (1) This tragedy presents a new field of discussion, for it is based on a Christian martyrdom. (2) Before considering the efficacy or inefficacy of such a subject for tragedy, it may be well to

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1. 1640 is the date given by the Frères Parfaict; 1643 by Marty-Laveaux. But Lanson in his Esquisse, states that it must have been before the publication of the Saül of du Ryer, the 'achevé d'imprimer' of which is dated May 31, 1642. Eugène Rigal has given conclusive evidence that Polyeucte was produced in the season of 1641-1642. Cf. article in Revue Universitaire, Vol. II, (1911). The material of this article has been reproduced by A. Morize in his volume, Problems and Methods of Literary History, Boston, 1922, pp. 136-138.
  2. On the subject of Polyeucte cf. the article by H. Hauvette, "Un Précurseur italien de Corneille: Girolamo Bartolommei," in the Annales de l'Université de Grenoble. (Vol. IX, 1897), pp. 557-577. Beyond the suggestion of the subjects of Polyeucte and Théodore, Hauvette sums up as follows, Corneille's debt to Bartolommei: The character of Félix, and his important position as prefect or governor of the province; the celebration of the Emperor's victory over the Persians; and in Théodore, the scene of the play. This article makes it very clear that Corneille at least knew the tragedies of Polietto and Théodora of Bartolommei, both of which had been published in 1632. Hauvette also shows that Bartolommei had very probably been in France just previous to the appearance of Polyeucte in 1642, but such a visit may have been subsequent to the composition of Corneille's play.





present at least briefly the plot of the play. Polyeucte, an Armenian, is married to Pauline, daughter of the Roman governor. Polyeucte inclines to Christianity and is about to embrace that faith. He hesitates only because Pauline has fearful forebodings of a violent death menacing Polyeucte, as had been predicted to her the preceding night in a dream. At last, he departs, leaving Pauline to narrate to Stratonice, her confidante, the details of this horrible dream. Before leaving Rome, Pauline had loved and been loved by Sévère, a valiant Roman soldier, but without fortune. In spite of her love for Sévère, she had obeyed her father, and soon after their arrival in Armenia, she had married Polyeucte. Not long after, they heard the report of Sévère's death on the field of battle. Yet in her dream, Sévère had threatened to kill Polyeucte, apparently out of jealousy of the preferred husband. At this point, occurs the first reversal of fortune (Act I, sc. 4), when Félix, father of Pauline, announces the arrival of the victorious Sévère, to celebrate a sacrifice. Both foresee that the real reason of his coming is to marry Pauline, now that he has risen in fortune. The father prevails on the daughter to see Sévère and temper his anger, when he shall have learned that she is the wife of another. The opening scene of Act II presents Sévère who heard from his confidant that Pauline is married. There follows the meeting between Pauline and Sévère, which is without incident, and the return of Polyeucte. Pauline still fears for the life





of Polyeucte, in spite of the apparent calm of Sévère. Act II, sc. 6 shows Polyeucte with his Christian friend Néarque, planning to overthrow the idols at the altar during the sacrifice, as Polyeucte's confession of faith. Polyeucte's ardor now goes beyond the hopes of Néarque who would dissuade him from this plan, which is sure to mean death to Polyeucte. Act III begins with a monologue by Pauline, whose fears are heightened by the knowledge that Sévère and Polyeucte will meet in the Temple during the sacrifice. Sc. 2 contains the narration by Stratonice of the catastrophe in the Temple, and in the third scene, Félix announces his sentence: Polyeucte shall repent or he shall die, like Néarque. Pauline is sent to urge Polyeucte to recant, while Albin relates to Félix the martyrdom of Néarque. Félix reveals the conflicting passions in his own heart; love of Polyeucte and a certain ambition, which would be furthered by the death of Polyeucte. Act IV opens with the appearance of Polyeucte, who has been sent for by Félix. Before the arrival of Pauline, there is time for Polyeucte to send a messenger to Sévère, and to soliloquize in lyric stanzas. In the meeting with Pauline, Polyeucte stands firm in his resolution not to betray his new faith. Upon the arrival of Sévère, Polyeucte entrusts Pauline to him, expressing the wish that they should marry and live happy, and die a Christian death. Pauline, instead of accepting Sévère, asks him to prevail upon her father to save Polyeucte. Sévère determines to make this sacrifice, not only of his love, but even perhaps of his favor with the Emperor, in order to prove himself worthy of Pauline. Act V shows Félix





who doubts the sincerity of Sévère's attempt to save Polyeucte, thinking that he seeks to accuse Félix before the Emperor. In spite of the pleas of Pauline, Félix orders that Polyeucte be killed. Pauline follows Polyeucte to the scaffold, and at the sight, she is converted to the Christian faith. When she begs death at the hands of her father, he too is touched by divine grace, and seeks the death of the martyrs. Sévère, at this spectacle, is moved to pardon both Félix and Pauline, and to promise to use his favor to diminish the severity of the Emperor towards the Christians.

The plot is very complex, and there are several reversals of fortune in the Aristotelian manner. The 'dénouement' may seem artificial, yet in fact, it is well motivated throughout. The calm dignity of Sévère's character and his inclination towards religious tolerance, make his last words 'vraisemblables'. Pauline's sudden conversion has been motivated by the words of Polyeucte (ll. 1276-1278):

Ce Dieu touche les cœurs lorsque moins on y pense.  
Ce bienheureux moment n'est pas encor venu;  
Il viendra, mais le temps ne m'en est pas connu;

and also by Pauline's own character, which leads her always to see Duty and to follow it. The conversion of Félix is less persuasive and less 'vraisemblable'; Corneille himself admits that he had recourse to that as the best way to dispose of this character. The Aristotelian method would have been for Félix to have killed himself, recognizing his error in sacrificing a noble soul to his own fears and ambitions. The plot itself, in its treatment, is Aristotelian, except for the detail of Félix, who is in reality a minor





figure. The characters will be studied later.

But what shall we say of the Christian subject? This was beyond the pale of Aristotle's criticism. What authority did Corneille have for presenting such an action? Corneille had some misgivings as to the success which would attend this play, due in part doubtless to the rigorous Unities and 'convenances', but in greater part, probably, because of its Christian subject.(1) These misgivings are evidenced by the fact that Corneille read the play at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, where it was received, according to Fontenelle (2), with distinct coldness. Corneille was tempted to withdraw the play from the actors, but was finally persuaded to leave it to its own fortunes. And indeed, at the Hotel de Bourgogne, Polyeucte won much favor.

The question of admitting a Christian martyrdom to the tragic stage has two possible objections: one as to the plot itself, and the other as to the perfect character of the hero. Both these objections were made in 1642, but only the second can be made on Aristotelian grounds. Let us comment briefly on the first objection, which deals with the fitness of such material for a tragic plot. In the Examen to the play, Corneille cites several authors who had used religious subjects on the stage, and the only suggestion of apology which he offers is for the fact that he has changed some of the historical details, as he might have done with a classical subject. Here, however, he says that while we

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1. The sixteenth century stage had produced a number of tragedies based on Biblical subjects (Saül, Jephté, Les Juives), but such subjects had somewhat lost favor in the seventeenth century.
2. Quoted by Marty-Laveaux, III, 466.





may change nothing which is in the Bible, with the lives of the saints it is different and the poet may be allowed the same freedom he would have with any other subject-matter.

On the score of the perfect hero, the objection is more valid, and Corneille himself recognized this in the Examen, for he says: "Ceux qui veulent arrêter nos héros dans une médiocre bonté, où quelques interprètes d'Aristote bornent leur vertu, ne trouveront pas ici leur compte, puisque celle de Polyeucte va jusqu'à la sainteté, et n'a aucun mélange de foiblesse." He then cites Minturno, who admits perfect heroes.<sup>e</sup>(1) And indeed, it is on the authority of Minturno alone that Corneille rested in this matter, for Aristotle's precept is clear: the tragic hero should not be wholly virtuous. The reasons adduced by Aristotle, as will be remembered, were sound enough, granted his other requirements: if the perfect hero is raised from bad to good fortune, the ending will be happy, which makes no tragedy, and if the perfect hero is brought from good fortune to bad, it only arouses our indignation and a sense of the wrong committed, without at all calming the passions, which is the proper function of Tragedy. It becomes, then, immediately clear that in the Aristotelian system, it is not possible to portray a wholly virtuous character. We may say that Polyeucte has a fatal flaw in the fanaticism which led him to overthrow the idols, but Corneille in his Christian ardor, painted this as a virtue, not an error. From -----

1. Cf. supra, Ch. II, for reference to Minturno's text.





Corneille's own viewpoint Polyeucte remains ever the perfect hero, and therefore un-Aristotelian. Since the essence of the subject of Polyeucte is the martyrdom of the hero, we must agree that it is not an Aristotelian subject.

Is the 'dénouement' Aristotelian? is it unhappy? Polyeucte is killed, to be sure, but is not the death of a martyr in a certain sense a triumph? We cannot examine into these matters too closely for fear of becoming casuistical, and we should perhaps consider that Polyeucte's death is the tragic incident, and gives to the tragedy an unhappy ending, if not completely tragic, in spite of the happy outcome for the other characters. As suggested above, the 'dénouement' would be more completely Aristotelian had Felix killed Pauline and finally himself.

As in Horace, Corneille gave to an essentially un-Aristotelian plot as nearly as possible, an Aristotelian treatment. Polyeucte comes nearer the true tragic hero than does Horace, since the hero is himself killed in the former, while in the latter it is only the heroine, and the hero stands ever triumphant. The fundamental quality of Polyeucte has been indicated when we said that he was wholly virtuous. As to the other requirements, he is not truly 'vraisemblable' or true to life, since the instances of martyrs are historical, not universal. As usual, Corneille has chosen a striking instance in history, of an uncommon situation, rather than a striking example of a common situation as did Racine. If we stop for a moment to reflect, we shall observe that in not one of the tragedies so far has Cor-





neille attained the Aristotelian ideal, and in every case, the one insurmountable obstacle has been that he chose an historical subject which could not be handled in the Aristotelian manner. Prudent advice was it indeed, when Aristotle warned in the Poetics that not every historical subject was capable of tragic treatment. Because he had not in all probability studied Aristotle's own text, Corneille never grasped this thought, nor the larger concept which was behind it, that 'le vraisemblable' is preferable to 'le vrai'.

The character of Polyeucte is not tragic in the Aristotelian sense, in spite of the fact that he meets death, for Corneille has depicted his hero as rising in strength throughout the play. In ll. 41 ff., we have the first intimation of Polyeucte's force of determination:

Vous me connoissez mal: la même ardeur me brûle,  
Et le désir s'accroît quand l'effet se recule:  
Ces pleurs, que je regarde avec un oeil d'époux  
Me laissent dans le coeur aussi chrétien que vous.

The ideal towards which he should strive, is pictured for him by Néarque in ll. 74 ff.:

Il faut ne rien aimer qu'après lui, qu'en lui-même,  
Négliger, pour lui (1) plaire, et femme, et biens, et rang,  
Exposer pour sa gloire et verser tout son sang.  
Mais que vous êtes loin de cette ardeur parfaite,  
Qui vous est nécessaire, et que je vous souhaite!

But if Polyeucte still lacks the necessary fervor, he will rise to those heights before the close of another act, for in ll. 686 ff., Polyeucte gives Néarque his own lesson in almost the same\* words.

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1 The Christian God.





The whole scene (Act III, sc. 6) is a masterful development of the future martyr's ardor, and his last words, which end the act, are:

Abandonnons nos jours à cette ardeur céleste:  
Faisons triompher Dieu: qu'il dispose du reste!

The accomplishment of his project is reported in the following act, in which Polyeucte does not himself appear. To compensate, the greater part of Act IV is devoted to Polyeucte, and includes his lyric stanzas (sc. 2), well adapted to his exalted state of mind. He has now definitely overcome all earthly obstacles, and is subject to his Will alone. He need no longer fear Pauline's tears, for they will be powerless against his superhuman Will. Cf. ll. 1145 ff.:

Saintes douceurs du ciel, adorables idées,  
Vous remplissez un coeur qui vous peut recevoir:  
De vos sacrés attraites les âmes possédées  
Ne conçoivent plus rien qui les puisse émouvoir.  
Vous promettez beaucoup, et donnez davantage.

He gives his final answer to Pauline (l. 1612):

Je ne vous connois plus, si vous n'êtes chrétienne.

and to the others he cries out (ll. 1670, 1671):

J'ai profané leur temple, et brisé leurs autels;  
Je le ferois encor, si j'avois à le faire. (1)

It is on this note of martyrdom that Polyeucte goes to his death—his moral triumph. He has neither the mediocre goodness required by Aristotle, nor is he true to life in the Aristotelian sense. Polyeucte is the most perfect Cornelian hero, and one of

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1. This line had already been used in the *Cid*, but it has its proper place in both tragedies; for it is the expression of a strong Will.





the most un-Aristotelian, in the long series of Corneille's tragedies.

Pauline is another heroine in the series of Chimène and Emilie, in that she never flinches from her duty. But unlike either Chimène or Emilie, she does not forge for herself imaginary, superhuman difficulties. Faced with the necessity of renouncing the man she loved, and marrying another, her perfect self-control conquers all emotions. It is by this invincible self-control that Pauline shows herself Cornelian. This quality is at the basis of her 'vertu', for which she is constantly solicitous. Cf. ll. 341 ff.: She follows her duty at every turn, burying her emotions, and scarcely evincing any regrets; she is over-strong. Her whole role is to be explained by her constant solicitude for her 'vertu', her 'gloire'. Cf. ll. 341 ff.:

Mon père, je suis femme, et je sais ma faiblesse;  
Je sens déjà mon cœur qui pour lui(2)s'intéresse,  
Et poussera sans doute, en dépit de ma foi,  
Quelque soupir indigne et de vous et de moi.

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Je n'ose m'assurer de toute ma vertu.

to which Félix answers (l. 353):

Ta vertu m'est connue.

And indeed Pauline does go through with the scene with Sévère, and even exceeds his courage. We have but to recall ll. 546 ff., to see that Pauline is, here at least, more Neo-Platonic, more superhuman, than Sévère:

vue

Paul.: Sauvez-vous d'une<sub>1</sub> à tous les deux funeste.  
Sév. : Quel prix de mon amour! quel fruit de mes  
travaux!

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1. Sévère.





Paul.: C'est le remède seul qui peut guérir nos maux.  
 Sév.: Je veux mourir des miens: aimez-en la mémoire.  
 Paul.: Je veux guérir des miens: ils souilleroient  
                   ma gloire!

This last recalls Sévère to his true self, (ll. 551 ff.):

Ah, puisque votre gloire en prononce l'arrêt,  
 Il faut que ma douleur cède à son intérêt.  
 Est-il rien que sur moi cette gloire n'obtienne?

And the scene ends with the parallel lines (571, 572):

Sév.: Adieu, trop vertueux objet, et trop charmant.  
 Paul.: Adieu, trop malheureux et trop parfait amant.

In the second scene with Sévère, also, is developed this theme of 'la gloire', so dear to Corneille's heroines. Cf. ll. 1332 ff.:

...Prisons là: je crains de trop entendre,  
 Et que cette chaleur, qui sent vos premiers feux,  
 Ne pousse quelque suite indigne de tous deux,  
 Sévère, connoissez Pauline toute entière.

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 Mais sachez qu'il n'est point de si cruels trépas  
 Où d'un front assuré je ne porte mes pas.

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 Plutôt que de souiller une gloire si pure,  
 Que d'épouser un homme, après son triste sort, (1)  
 Qui de quelque façon soit cause de sa mort;  
 -----

Sévère meets the demand on his 'gloire', and in answer to Fabian's query (l. 1390):

D'un si cruel effort quel prix espérez-vous?

Sévère replies:

La gloire de montrer à cette âme si belle  
 Que Sévère l'égale, et qu'il est digne d'elle:

Here Corneille has carried to its logical end the Neo-Platonic ideal which he had begun in Rodrigue and Chimène(2).

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 1. Cf. Polyeucte.

2. It receives its final expression when Polyeucte says to Pauline and Sévère (l. 1305): Vous êtes digne d'elle.





Pauline is indeed a fit subject for a sudden conversion, as Corneille expresses it through Polyeucte (ll. 1268):

Elle a trop de vertus pour n'être pas chretienne:  
Avec trop de merite il vous plut la former,  
Pour ne vous pas connoître et ne vous pas aimer,  
Pour vivre des enfers esclave infortunée,  
Et sous leur triste joug mourir comme elle est née.

After the martyrdom of her husband, this duty assumes the new form of embracing the Christian religion. Pauline has no fatal flaw, but is wholly good, never giving in to the many temptations which beset her: first as to her marriage to Polyeucte, next upon seeing Sévère; later in marrying Severe when the path is again left open to her. Her first thought is her duty of obedience to her father; her second, her duty to her husband. She is thoroughly un-Aristotelian, as is also her ending.

Sévère is the 'parfait amant' -- Corneille uses the expression several times. (1) He is the Don Sanche of this play, but Corneille has become a sufficient master of technique to weave him more intimately into the action of the play. Sévère, too, is thoroughly good, overly good, one is tempted to say. In spite of all his over-turned hopes, he never loses control of himself and is at all times the personification of dignity. This character is the most complete development of the Neo-Platonic ideal to be found in Corneille's tragedies. The words of Pauline (ll. 1349 ff.) present his role, and Corneille's conception of the 'parfait amant' very clearly:

Vous êtes généreux; soyez-le jusqu'au bout.

.....





Je sais que c'est beaucoup que ce que je demande;  
Mais plus l'effort est grand, plus la gloire en  
est grand.

Conserver un rival dont vous êtes jaloux,  
C'est un trait de vertu qui n'appartient qu'à vous;  
Et si ce n'est assez de votre renommé,  
C'est beaucoup qu'une femme autrefois tant aimée,

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Doive à votre grand coeur ce qu'elle a de plus cher;  
Souvenez-vous enfin que vous êtes Sévère.  
Adieu: résolvez seul ce que vous voulez faire;  
Si vous n'êtes pas tel que je l'ose espérer  
Pour vous priser encor je le veux ignorer.

But Sévère does fulfill Pauline's expectations and ends in a triumph of self-mastery.

Félix is not one of the main characters, from the Aristotelian point of view, although he does motivate the 'dénouement'. He is a weak, despicable character from the beginning to the end, except for his supernatural conversion, which Corneille admits was a dramatic loophole rather than a psychological conclusion. At no point is Félix represented as a fine personality. The first mention of him is by Pauline in ll. 210 ff:

Mon père fut ravi qu'il me prît pour maîtresse,  
Et par son alliance il se crut assuré  
D'être plus redoutable et plus considéré.

As these lines set the note for this character throughout the play, we need not devote further space to quotations. Being a secondary personage, we cannot demand of him the qualities required for the tragic protagonist, but it is patent that he cannot be termed Aristotelian. All the main figures: Polyeucte, Pauline, Sévère, command our Admiration. They are all embodiments of the Cornelian hero, "le généreux". In Polyeucte, Corneille has reached a high point in his genius, and this tragedy gives an almost complete development of the Cornelian type,





which is fundamentally opposed to the Aristotelian tragic hero.

In this discussion of character, we have foreshadowed clearly the topic of Katharsis and there remain but few comments to be made. Polyeucte is, par excellence, the tragedy of Admiration, in the manner of Minturno. Just as Minturno himself, by his theory of Admiration, was brought to admit that the best material for tragedies is to be found in the Christian religion, so Corneille, with his natural inclination to portray heroic and admirable characters, made his supreme effort on a Christian subject and produced his most finished tragedy: Polyeucte.

We may be permitted to anticipate some of the statements to be made in our concluding chapter, namely, that Polyeucte represents, on certain grounds at least, the highest point in Corneille's Aristotelianism. At the same time, however, the dominant note in Polyeucte is Admiration, i. e., the most un-Aristotelian quality in Corneille. In this tragedy, he has liberated himself from the essence of Aristotle's teaching, for not one of his characters is Aristotelian; there is neither Pity nor Fear, and the Katharsis is Italian, not Greek.

On the external side, the story is quite different. The three Unities are handled with striking success. Corneille is aware of this technical excellence and exclaims in the Examen, "A mon gré, je n'ai point fait de pièce où l'ordre du théâtre soit plus beau et l'enchaînement des scènes mieux ménagé. L'unité d'action, et celles de jour et de lieu, y ont leur justesse----." As usual, Corneille finds, as others might, by





examining very closely, some points at which the natural course of events would have taken more time, but the basic requirement that the time should not be so hurried as to allow the action to seem crowded, is easily fulfilled. The fact is that in Polyeucte we have the most perfect application of the three Unities which Corneille ever attained. In Cinna, the Unity of Action was marred by the shift of interest. Here, the Unity of Action is perfect, and the plot transpires easily within the specified time and place without doing violence to Poetic Truth.

Poetic Truth can scarcely be discussed in connection with a play of this type. The subject is 'vrai', not 'vraisemblable', and must be accepted or rejected on that basis. We have seen that once armed with the truth of history, Corneille felt no concern for poetic truth, of which in fact, he had no real understanding. As applied to the characters, we have seen that the Aristotelian verisimilitude is lacking, since the three main protagonists are wholly virtuous, without the fatal flaw which would make them 'men like ourselves'. On the other hand, Corneille has mastered the technical side of tragedy, and there are no longer instances of 'invraisemblances' in time or place.

More than Horace, more than Cinna, which may both be said to be attempts towards an ideal, Polyeucte represents the high point in Corneille's technical perfection. But more than either of the preceding plays, Polyeucte is also the most tremendous Apotheosis of the Human Will in all of Corneille's tragedies. For here three characters triumph:





Polyeucte becomes a martyr to his new-found faith, which is the height of his ambition; Pauline conquers her love for Sévère on two, even three occasions (1); Sévère conquers his jealousy on two occasions. (2) From the standpoint of Aristotelianism, Polyeucte marks an advance over Cinna in but one respect: it has a tragic ending for the hero. In its characters and its Katharsis, Polyeucte is no more truly Aristotelian than Horace or Cinna.

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1. In the original consent to marry Polyeucte; in Act II, sc. 2; and in Act IV, sc. 5.
  2. Act II, sc. 1; Act IV, sc. 6.





## CHAPTER IX - POMPEE

Following close upon Polyeucte in the winter of 1642-1643, there appeared Pompée, which was a return to Roman history, since the material is taken from Seneca and Lucan. Yet it is interesting to note a statement made by Corneille in the Epître to Le Menteur, where he insists on the Spanish origins of both Seneca and Lucan. In his earlier period, we have observed the strong influence of Spain--an influence which is to dominate again in Corneille's later tragedies. However, at the time of writing Pompée, Corneille had in mind the essentially Roman, classic nature of the subject, and he himself explains the return to classical material in the Epître to Le Menteur: "J'ai fait Pompée pour satisfaire à ceux qui ne trouvoient pas les vers de Polyeucte si puissants que ceux de Cinna, et leur montrer que j'en saurois retrouver la pompe, quand le sujet le pourroit souffrir". But in the conscious effort to lend pompousness to his verses, Corneille was misled into a stiffness and coldness, which pervades the plot itself and the characters, making of them abstractions rather than realities.

Corneille has outlined the plot of Pompée in the Discours au Poëme Dramatique (1): "Ptolomée craint que César, qui vient

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, I, 26.





en Egypte, ne favorise sa soeur dont il est amoureux, et ne le force à lui rendre sa part du royaume que son père lui a laissé par testament: pour attirer la faveur de son côté par un grand service, il lui immole Pompée; ce n'est pas assez, il faut voir comment César recevra ce grand sacrifice. Il arrive, il s'en fâche, il menace Ptolomée, il le veut obliger d'immoler les conseillers de cet attentat à cet illustre mort; ce roi, surpris de cette réception si peu attendue, se resout à prévenir César, et conspire contre lui, pour éviter par sa perte le malheur dont il se voit menacé. Ce n'est pas encore assez; il faut savoir ce qui réussira de cette conspiration. César en a l'avis, et Ptolomée, périssant dans un combat avec ses ministres, laisse Cléopâtre en paisible possession du royaume dont elle demandoit la moitié, et César hors de péril; l'auditeur n'a plus rien à demander, et sort satisfait, parce que l'action est complète."

Corneille gave this outline of the play as an example of a unified and well-constructed plot, according to his own theories. The action is well knit together, but in this very outline, Corneille has brought out the un-Aristotelian qualities of his plot: Cléopâtre and César are both "hors de péril"--the ending is not tragic. Never since Horace, has Corneille approached the Aristotelian 'dénouement', nor does he ever again in his later plays. This is entirely due to Corneille's conception of his characters.

Just as he had wished to depict Horace as the "guerrier trop magnanime", and Auguste as the "maître de soi comme





de l'univers", so here César is to be "magnanime" and "vertueux". It is the Cornelian type of the "héros généreux" which has become an obsession with him. In Horace, the action was still historic and true to the character of the hero; in Cinna, Corneille chose a little-known incident and one not typical of the character of Augustus; in the César of Pompée, this clemency was carried to the point of honoring his bitterest enemy. What had been entirely acceptable in Horace, less so in Auguste, is now sheer exaggeration, lacking all probability, in the character of César. Throughout the play, the Emperor is shown as magnanimous and with a splendid sense of justice, neither of which traits has been emphasized by history. It would seem that Corneille felt this criticism, and endeavored in part to obviate it, by explaining this eagerness to atone for Pompée's death. As early as l. 174, Septime anticipates the end of the play:

Il (César) lui (à Pompée) pardonnera, s'il faut  
qu'il en dispose,  
Et s'armant à regret de générosité,  
D'une fausse clémence il fera vanité:  
Heureux de l'asservir en lui donnant la vie,  
Et de plaire par là à Rome asservie!

It was not the living Pompée that César pardoned, but the dead Pompée, to whom he granted not only pardon, but the highest honors. This attitude which César is to take is again anticipated in the narration of Pompée's death, ll.

494-496:

Mes yeux ont vu le reste, et mon coeur en soupire,  
Et croit que César même à de si grands malheurs  
Ne pourra refuser des soupirs et des pleurs.





In ll. 773 ff., the same thought is repeated, but with the emphasis on the idea that there was a certain satisfaction in knowing that he was freed from the menace:

Et je dirai, si j'ose en faire conjecture,  
Que, par un mouvement commun à la nature,  
Quelque maligne joie en son cœur s'élevait,  
Dont sa gloire indignée à peine le sauvait.  
L'aise de voir la terre à son pouvoir soumise  
Chatouillait malgré lui son âme avec surprise,  
Et de cette douceur son esprit combattu  
Avec un peu d'effort rassurait sa vertu.  
S'il aime sa grandeur, il hait la perfidie,

In this characterization, it is evident that Corneille sought to be fair, by portraying both sides of his hero's character (cf. the third and last lines of the quotation). We should not be misled by line 1072 when Cornélie exclaims:

O ciel, que de vertus vous me faites haïr!

This is said in a moment of surprise, and later, when she reflects on the situation, she too echoes the thought that clemency and magnanimity are now easy virtues, and even expedient. Cf. ll. 1537 ff.:

O soupirs! ô respect! oh! qu'il est doux de plaindre  
Le sort d'un ennemi quand il n'est plus à craindre.  
Qu'avec chaleur, Philippe, on court à le venger  
Lorsqu'on s'y voit forcé par son propre danger,  
Et quand cet intérêt qu'on prend pour sa mémoire  
Fait notre sûreté comme il croît notre gloire.

But Cornélie again changes and in her last speech renders all homage to the Emperor. She now seems persuaded of the sincerity of his generosity (ll. 1725 ff.):

Je t'avouerai pourtant, comme vraiment Romaine,  
Que pour toi mon estime est égale à ma haine,  
-----  
Tu vois que ta vertu, qu'en vain on veut trahir,  
Me force de priser ce que je dois haïr.





It seems clear that Corneille painted César in too glowing colors: he entirely lacks the 'fatal flaw' of Aristotelian doctrine, and since the fatal flaw is the essential requirement for a character to be poetically true, it is immediately apparent that the role of César lacks 'vraisemblance'.

Similarly with Cléopâtre. While she is shown as proud, haughty, and filled with ambition, yet her sense of justice, first as regards Pompey, and later towards her brother, does not fit in with the historical Cleopatra. As Lemaître words it (1): "il est bien étrange que.....cette jeune reine vertueuse et magnanime, coquette à peine, ce soit Cléopâtre". A few quotations will suffice to show the coloring which Corneille lends to his heroine. In ll. 623, 624, she says:

J'ai de l'ambition, mais je sais la régler:  
Elle peut m'éblouir, et non pas m'aveugler.

And throughout the play, she lives up to this standard; at no point does she seek to gain the throne from her brother, nor does she glory in it when it comes to her through his death.

Antony's description of the charms of Cleopatra emphasizes her gentleness, nobility, modesty (ll. 947, 948; 955):

Le ciel n'a point encor, par de si doux accords,  
Uni tant de vertus aux grâces d'un beau corps.  
-----  
Par un reins modeste-----

And at the end of the play, when Ptolomée is in the midst of

1. Petit de Julleville, Hist. de la Langue et de la Litt. Fr., IV, 296.





the fray with Caesar's soldiers, she is constantly looking out to save her unworthy, ungrateful brother. It is like an echo of l. 634:

Et je suis bonne sœur si vous n'êtes bon frère,  
when we read l. 1434:

Je ne puis oublier que leur chef est mon frère.  
It is indeed not possible to see in this perfect heroine the ambitious, unscrupulous Cleopatra.

Since Pompée does not himself speak, he cannot be considered as one of the characters of the play. Yet the title is justified, since it is his death that motivates all the action.

Cornélie's role, while historical, has also a dramatic justification in the requirement of symmetry. She is far better incorporated in the action than Sabine in Marce, and she is drawn true to our conception of her. History depicts her as a Cornelian heroine, and she fits perfectly into his dramatic scheme. She is the worthy counterpart of Pompée; if he is 'le glorieux Romain', she represents quite adequately 'la glorieuse Romaine', a type so dear to the generation of Balzac and Corneille. The same of dignity is contained in ll. 1021, 1022:

Car enfin n'attends pas que j'abaisse ma haine:  
Je te l'ai déjà dit, César, je suis Romaine.

We might quote other lines of the same type, but this one couplet sums up the character of Cornélie.

Ptolomée is the Félix of this play, the weak character





led only by ambition, and constantly cringing before those of superior powers. Such a character was loathsome to Corneille on account of his very weakness and indecision. Ptolomée's role is that of the modern villain, and he is killed at the end of the tragedy. In this reward of the virtuous and punishment of the wicked, Pompée is the first tragedy in Corneille's later manner. It is the same type which we shall find in Rodogune, and in Héraclius, the two most important tragedies of this period.

By its plot and its characters, which Lemaître terms "simplifiés à outrance et figés dans une attitude unique"(1), Pompée begins a new type of Cornelian play. But in its handling of the Unities, it is still closely linked to Horace and Cinna. We have seen by Corneille's own analysis that the play has Unity of Action, uninterrupted by episodes, and carried to a logical 'dénouement'.

Unity of Time occasioned the usual manoeuvring, for Corneille was obliged to falsify historical facts. The story which is here made to transpire in twenty-four hours covered in reality something like a year's time. Corneille says in the Examen: "Pour le temps il m'a fallu réduire en soulèvement tumultueux une guerre qui n'a pu durer guère moins d'un an". But in thus changing the facts of history, Corneille has acted according to Aristotle's principles. He did not falsify history, but avoided those details which would have made the time element too evident. All that is presented in

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1. Petit de Julleville, Hist. de la Langue et de la Litt. Fr., IV, 296.





the tragedy could well have taken place in the twenty-four hours, although as in Horace, it would have constituted a very busy day. However, in Pompeé, Corneille has not historical truth to counterbalance the lack of verisimilitude. We may therefore say that the Unity of Time is not so complete in Pompeé as in Horace.

There are very few textual references to time in Pompeé. The first occurs in l. 323:

Et peut-être aujourd'hui vos yeux seront témoins  
De ce que votre esprit s' imagine le moins.

No other mention of time is given until l. 941:

Par un prompt sacrifice e piez tous vos crimes,  
which hastens the action somewhat and motivates it at the same time. Ll. 978, 980 contain the most striking reference to time we have yet found:

O ciel, et ne pourrai-je enfin à mon amour  
Donner en liberté ce qui reste du jour?

This is undoubtedly intentional on the part of Corneille, who would thus indicate, as it were, the middle of the action. L. 1112 is a type we have found in preceding plays:

Deux fois en même jour disposons des Romains.

It reminds one of the time element, and also of the closely knit plot. The same expression is used also in l. 1409:

De voir en même jour-----

Ll. 1146 ff. recall a similar passage in the Cid:

Cette ville a sous terre une secrète issue,  
Par où fort aisément on les peut cette nuit  
Jusque dans le palais introduire sans bruit.

The action is again pushed forward, but with reason, in l.





1423:

Va, ne perds point de temps, il presse.

This is at the point where Cornélie is warning César of the planned assassination. Ll. 1495, 1496 are certainly meant to explain away one objection to the brief time allowed:

Je lui dresse un bûcher à la hâte et sans art,  
Tel que je pus sur l'heure, et qu'il plut au hasard.

L. 1695 is again a type we have found before:

Pour ces justes devoirs je ne veux que demain.

Here the author brings in the idea of a longer time, but ends the play before the actions which are to take place on the following day. This is a negative way in which to remind the audience that all actions performed or narrated throughout the tragedy have occurred in but one day. This vista of "Demain" is left open from now on, and mention of it is made twice again, in l. 1754, by Cornélie, and in l. 1808 by César. As in the Cid the play was ended with the thought:

Prends un an, si tu veux-----

so here also, the author leaves with the audience a broader time limit than was allowed for the action of the play.

In Pompée, Corneille has shown the same conscious study of the technique of Time as we have seen in the three previous plays. We have said that it was not as perfect here as in Cinna, for example, since more external action is necessary for the understanding of the plot. It is not probable, i.e., not universal or typical, that so many incidents of serious importance should occur in one day.

As for Place, Corneille gives the following indication



It is now about 10 years, I believe.

As far as the other matter is concerned, I believe that it

has almost disappeared. It has been very small.

There is no longer any question as to the fact that it

is the same as before. It is the same as before.

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at the beginning: "La scène est en Alexandrie, dans le palais de Ptolomée". This is the regular 'palais à volonté' and gives rise to the same improbabilities which we have met elsewhere: the first act fits perfectly into the one-room setting, but beginning with the second act, it becomes apparent that Cléopâtre would not speak her confidences to Charmion in that same room. It is, however, if not probable, at least possible. Cléopâtre is represented as awaiting the first reception of César in her own apartments, which would have necessitated a change of scene; but Corneille has deftly avoided this, by narrating this meeting. On the whole, we may say, not only that Corneille handled well the Unity of Place in this play, but that the nature of the plot permitted such treatment. Corneille was successful with the Unities only when his subject made it possible, which was not true for most of his plots.

We have now seen, in discussing the several topics that Verisimilitude is, and is not, observed. Corneille changed the facts of history, both for the plot and for the characters. Yet, in so far as he maintained the general framework of the story, he complied with Aristotelian requirements. There is nothing in the action itself which would shock the historical sense of an audience. The characters are not historical nor are they poetically true, for they lack the fatal weakness which would have made them human. Corneille was forced to this 'dénouement' by history, for he was not free to have either Caesar or Cleopatra killed, since the audience was too well





acquainted with their story. Once again, it is a case of choosing a subject impossible of Aristotelian treatment. Corneille's conception of tragedy, which to his mind was rather what we should term drama, demanded situations and characters which were in direct opposition to Aristotle's doctrine. This will become increasingly apparent in the succeeding chapters.





## CHAPTER X - RODOGUNE

Rodogune, which appeared in 1644 or 1645, is the most important play in the later manner of Corneille, and is the tragedy which he himself preferred to all those which modern criticism has considered to be his masterpieces. This tragedy was probably first presented on the stage of the Hotel de Bourgogne; it immediately eclipsed the play of the same name by Gilbert.(1) It is significant also that Brunetière, in his Epoques du Théâtre Français, devotes one lecture to Rodogune, which he chose in preference to any other of the later plays for a number of reasons stated at the outset of his discussion. In addition to the fact that Corneille himself ranked this tragedy above all his others, there is the added fact of its great popularity during the very period when Racine's glory was the highest.(2) Also, as has been recalled by Brunetière, and by Professor Nitze, (3) Lessing, a century later, directed his attack on the French stage against Rodogune in particular.

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, IV, 399 ff.

2. Cf. Brunetière, Epoques du Théâtre Français, p. 58.

3. Nitze, W. A. and Dargan, E. P., A History of French Literature, New York, 1922.





But a more important reason still for devoting a long study to Rodogune is the fact that it is the most complete, the most perfect expression of the truly Cornelian tragedy; by its complicated plot, by the exaggerated fixity and almost rigidity of its characters, and by its eloquent verse, Rodogune exemplifies well all that Corneille prized most in his dramatic genius. Yet, from the Aristotelian point of view, the study of Rodogune will be entirely negative. We have seen how Corneille's natural tendencies in plot and character were divergent from the Aristotelian model, and in Rodogune we shall find the new Cornelian model at its best. Some of the later plays will be constructed on the same plan, but none is so perfect a specimen as Rodogune.

The situation presented in this play is as follows: Two princes, twin brothers, Antiochus and Seleucus, are placed between two women, Rodogune, a Parthian princess, and Cleopatra, queen of Syria. Rodogune is beloved by both princes. Their mother, Cleopatra, is, in addition, the murderer of their father. Born a few minutes apart, and brought up away from the court, the princes do not know which of them is the heir to the throne. At the opening of the action it is agreed that Rodogune and the throne of Syria will go to the elder of the two princes. Cleopatra alone knows which of the sons is the elder, but this barbarous mother, unwilling to renounce the throne herself, conceives the idea of bestowing the birth-right upon whichever son will rid her of the odious Rodogune by assassinating her. Rodogune, in turn, demands the assassi-





nation of Cleopatra as a condition of her consent to marry either of the princes. Such is the plot of this tragedy, which Brunetière calls "l'un des plus dramatiques assurément ou'il y ait, si toutefois l'atracité des situations est la mesure de la beauté d'un drame".(1) That is indeed a question not easy to solve, and which we fortunately need not seek to answer here.

If we analyze the action of this tragedy, we see at once that it is more unified, more artfully constructed, more closely bound together, than any of the other tragedies up to this time. Only the four characters are needed, with their respective 'confidants', and the action is wholly resultant upon the interplay of these characters. In this respect, Corneille has approached more closely the technique of Racine than in any other of his plays, both as regards the construction of the plot, and the subject itself, in which the love element is intimately connected with the fate of an Empire.(2) Yet Corneille is still far from the Racinian manner in his use of history. In Rodogune, quite as much as in Polyeucte, Corneille needed the support of history to defend his extraordinary action, whereas in Andromaque or Pérénice the mere changing of the historical names would suffice to make these two plots the ordinary experiences of everyday psychology. Corneille will never lose his fondness for the extraordinary in plot and character--rather, we shall see that it will be

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1. Cf. Époques du Théâtre Français, p. 62.

2. Cf. Andromaque or Pérénice.





accentuated beyond bounds in the later tragedies, which are truly 'comédies héroïques' if not actually melodramas.

In Rodogune Corneille has presented an historical subject, but one which is only historical. That is to say, while in Horace the subject had the broader aspect of Patriotism, and in Cinna, of Insurrection, in Rodogune there is no general appeal, it is the story of an individual case. And for that very reason, as Prunetiere has pointed out (1), Rodogune loses much of its interest. The subject is "extraordinaire" and "au-delà du vraisemblable" and therefore not Aristotelian. Neither the plot nor the characters of Rodogune are psychologically true or universal. Thus we have reached with Rodogune the point at which Corneille has freed himself utterly of all Aristotelian qualities, except as they are dramatic necessities which no writer could disregard. It is in connection with this play that we are made most clearly aware of the fundamental opposition between the dramatic doctrines of Aristotle and those of Corneille. Rodogune pleased Corneille because of the invincible strength of Will displayed in it, which is exactly the element condemned by Aristotle. Those features of the play which are still Aristotelian, are the semi-tragic 'dénouement', where at least the heroine and her son meet death; and the masterful way in which the dramatic interest is sustained from act to act until the fearful end.

Let us now trace the development of this complicated plot through its own verses. The opening line sounds the note

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1. Époques du Théâtre Français, p. 74.





of illustriousness, which is to be maintained throughout:

Enfin, ce jour pompeux, cet heureux jour nous luit,  
Qui d'un trouble si long doit dissiper la nuit.

And in this first speech, Leonice sets forth the situation: the Queen is to announce which of the Princes is the older; and all discord with the Parthians is to cease, for Rodogune their princess is to marry the Prince who is to rule in Syria.

Antiochus, one of the Princes, offers to cede any claims to the throne if Séleucus will grant him Rodogune, but this arrangement is thwarted, for Séleucus has conceived the same idea, and the situation is left as at the beginning. But the two brothers swear eternal friendship for each other, which is of importance to the later development of the plot.

(ll. 169, 170):

Il faut encor plus faire: il faut qu'en ce grand jour  
Notre amitié triomphe aussi bien que l'amour.

Rodogune is now presented, and her first speech indicates her mistrust of the Queen (l. 299):

Je ne sais quel malheur aujourd'hui me menace.

Again in l. 311:

En un mot, je crains tout de l'esprit de la Reine.

Her longer speech (ll. 313-327), not only anticipates the action, but also presents the Queen as we are to see her in Act II:

La haine entre les grands ne calme rarement;  
La paix souvent n'y sert que d'un amusement;  
Et dans l'Etat, où j'entre, à se parler sans feinte,  
Elle a lieu de me craindre, et je crains cette  
crainte.

-----  
J'oublie, et pleinement, toute mon aventure;  
Mais une grande offense est de cette nature,





Que toujours son auteur impute à l'offensé,  
 Un vif ressentiment dont il le croit blessé;  
 Et quoiqu'en apparence on les réconcilie,  
 Il le craint, il le hait, et jamais ne s'y fie;  
 Et toujours alarmé de cette illusion,  
 Sitôt qu'il peut le perdre, il prend l'occasion:  
 Telle est pour moi la Reine.-----

Corneille gives us this picture here because Cleopatra herself is not to appear in the first Act, and Corneille's theory is that all the principal actors should either appear or be mentioned, and all necessary explanation of the situation given in the first act.

We are now prepared for the balanced attitude of Rodogune toward the two Princes by her command of her passion (ll. 375 ff.):

De celui que je crains si je suis le partage,  
 Je saurai l'accepter avec même visage;  
 L'hymen me le rendra précieux à son tour,  
 Et le devoir fera ce qu'aurait fait l'amour.

As we should expect, the first speech of Cleopatra, which opens the second act, shows her character immediately (ll. 395 ff.):

Serments fallacieux, salutaire contrainte,  
 Que m'impose la force et qu'accepte ma crainte,  
 Heureux déguisements d'un immortel courroux!

-----  
 Je hais, je règne encor. Laissons d'illustres  
 marques  
 En quittant, s'il le faut, ce haut rang des  
 monarques.

-----  
 C'est encor, c'est encor cette même ennemie  
 Qui cherche ses honneurs dans mon infamie,  
 Dont la haine à son tour croit me faire la loi,  
 Et régner par mon ordre sur vous et sur moi.  
 Tu m'estimes bien lâche, imprudente rivale,  
 Si tu crois que mon cœur jusque-là se ravale,  
 Qu'il souffre qu'un hymen qu'on t'a promis en vain  
 Te mette ta vengeance et mon sceptre en ta main.











Ne saurois-tu juger que si je nomme un roi,  
C'est pour le commander, et combattre pour moi?  
J'en ai le choix en main avec le droit d'aînesse;

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J'usurai bien du droit que j'ai de le nommer.  
On ne montera point au rang dont je dévale,  
Qu'en épousant sa haine au lieu de sa rivale:  
Ce n'est qu'en me vengeance qu'on me le peut ravir,  
Et je ferai régner qui me voudra servir.

Also ll. 644, 645:

Embrasser sa querelle est le seul droit d'aînesse:  
La mort de Rodogune en nommera l'aîné.

When Rodogune is told of this menace, Oronte, her brother's ambassador, urges her to profit by the love of the two Princes for her (ll. 831-836):

L'Amour fera lui seul tout ce qu'il vous faut faire.  
Faites-vous un rempart des fils contre la mère;

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Quoi que puisse en ces lieux une reine cruelle,  
Pouvant tout sur ses fils, vous y pouvez plus qu'elle.

Upon the appearance of the two Princes before Rodogune, Antiochus requests the future Queen to choose between the Princes, and the one of her choice will seize the kingdom as his rightful heritage. Rodogune now states her condition (ll. 1024 ff.):

J'aime les fils du Roi, je hais ceux de la Reine:  
Régalez-vous là-dessus; et sans plus me presser,  
Voyez auquel des deux vous voulez renoncer.

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Si vous leur (1) préférez une mère cruelle,  
Soyez cruels, ingrats, parricides comme elle.  
Vous devez la punir, si vous la condamnez;  
Vous devez l'imiter, si vous la soutenez.

She restates this in ll. 1044, 1045:

Pour gagner Rodogune il faut venger un père.

Again the symmetry is perfect, for both Cleopatra and Rodogune have made their propositions, neither of which is  
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1. La gloire and l'amour.





acceptable to the Princes. It would seem an impasse but that Antiochus hopes to conquer either Cleopatra or Rodogune emotionally. Cf. ll. 1128-1120:

Cependant allons voir si nous vaincrons l'orage,  
Et si contre l'effort d'un si puissant courroux  
La nature et l'amour voudront parler pour nous.

Thus at the opening of the fourth act, the 'noeud' is tied as tightly as possible, and there is no hint as to the 'dénouement' that awaits us. The first step in the untangling is when Antiochus wrests from Rodogune the avowal of her love for him (ll. 1209, 1210):

Oui, j'aime un de vous deux malgré ce grand courroux,  
Et ce dernier soupir dit assez que c'est vous.

Given new courage by these words, Antiochus now braves the Queen and hopes to bend her Will (ll. 1257, 1258):

Voici la Reine, Amour, nature, justes Dieux,  
Faites-la-moi fléchir ou mourir à ses jeux.

The plot takes a surprising turn in ll. 1351 ff., when Cleopatra seems to be moved by maternal affection:

Vos larmes dans mon coeur ont trop d'intelligence;  
-----  
Je sens que je suis mère auprès de vos douleurs.  
C'en est fait, je me rends, et ma colère expire:  
Rodogune est à vous aussi bien que l'empire.  
Rendez grâces aux Dieux qui vous ont fait l'aîné:  
Possédez-la, réglez.

But this is almost immediately explained for the reader by the monologue of Cleopatra which begins (ll. 1357-1403):

Que tu pénètres mal le fond de mon courage!  
Si je verse des pleurs, ce sont des pleurs de rage.

As she addresses in thought her son Antiochus, she says:

Va, triomphe en idée avec ta Rodogune,  
Au sort des immortels préfère ta fortune,  
Tandis que mieux instruite en l'art de me venger,





En de nouveaux malheurs je saurai te plonger.  
-----

Et c'est mal démêler le cœur d'avec le front,  
Que prendre pour sincère un changement si prompt.  
L'effet te fera voir comme je suis changée.

The next complication of plot which Corneille has devised was an attempt on Cleopatra's part to incite Séleucus against his brother, by telling him that he was really the elder of the two. Cleopatra is quite incapable of comprehending the friendship which Séleucus attests as a safeguard against any harsh feeling towards Antiochus. Cf. ll. 1473-1476:

-----mais enfin n'espérez voir en moi  
Qu'amitié pour mon frère, et zèle pour mon roi.  
Adieu.  
(Cléo.) De quel malheur suis-je encore capable?  
Leur amour m'offensoit, leur amitié m'accable.

The situation does not long baffle Cleopatra, for Corneille has conceived the last crime possible to his 'heroine of the Will': to kill both her sons. Since she cannot avenge herself through them, she will avenge herself upon them. (ll. 1485 ff.):

Je sais bien qu'en l'état où tous deux je les voi,  
Il me les faut percer pour aller jusqu'à toi;  
Mais n'importe: mes mains sur le père enhardies  
Pour un bras refusé sauront prendre deux vies;  
-----  
J'ai commencé par lui, j'achèverai par eux.

Thus ends this fourth act, so luxuriant in plot and complications, and all the result of the most intense interplay of the rational faculties of the characters represented.

Act V is opened by a monologue of Cleopatra who announces the death of Séleucus. This least important character is now disposed of, and the stage is left clear for the intensely





dramatic situation of this last act, between the three principal characters: Cleopatra, Rodogune, and Antiochus. This monologue now reveals the whole plan of Cleopatra: to kill both Antiochus and Rodogune, with the one motive of retaining the throne for herself. (ll. 1507; 1512-1514; 1528-1529):

Poison, me sauras-tu rendre mon diadème?  
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Je ne veux point pour fils l'époux de Rodogune,  
Et ne vois plus en lui les restes de mon sang.  
S'il m'arrache du trône et la met en mon rang.  
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Dût le ciel égaler le supplice à l'offense  
Trône, à t'abandonner je ne puis consentir.

But Corneille has reserved one more reversal of fortune for this last act. Just as Antiochus is about to drink from the fatal goblet, Timagène enters and tells of the death of Séleucus. The dramatic importance of this is that he had died without finishing the accusation of his assassin. (ll. 1643 ff.):

"Une main qui nous fut bien chère  
Venge ainsi le refus d'un coup trop inhumain.  
Régnez, et surtout, mon cher frère,  
Gardez-vous de la même main.

"C'est..." La Parque à ce mot lui coupe la  
parole.

It is the purest melodrama to thus break the sentence just as the fatal name was to be spoken, and this is what arouses the objections of the critics. Antiochus is now suspicious of both Cleopatra and Rodogune, and in the impossibility of avoiding or averting the imminent danger, he again prepares to drink the fateful draught, when Rodogune stops him, suspicious in her turn. In a last effort to gain her victory,





Cleopatra challenges the lovers by first drinking from the cup herself. But the poison takes effect too promptly, and Antiochus and Rodogune are present at her death agonies. This criminal heroine still claims a certain victory, ll.

1815, 1816:

Mais j'ai cette douceur dedans cette disgrâce  
De ne voir point régner ma rivale en ma place.

This couplet was followed in the first edition, by eight verses which resumed all of Cleopatra's machinations to retain the throne. (1) The ending was melodramatic, and adapted to the popular tastes, and the whole action is epitomized in l. 1836:

La coupable est punie et vos mains innocentes.

This is a type of 'dénouement' condemned by Aristotle, in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded, to the great delight of the populace. Yet, if we reflect that Cleopatra was not so much a wicked figure in Corneille's mind, as the perfect embodiment of his great ideal, the Human Will, we must consider that the 'heroine' of this tragedy came indeed to a tragic end, which would make the 'dénouement' thoroughly Aristotelian. We must remember as was said in our discussion of Médée, that 'goodness' to Corneille, was not a moral quality, (2) but resolved itself into a new quality which he terms 'grandeur d'ame'. (3)

The very number of quotations which we have given here to

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1. Cf. Marty-Laveaux, IV, n. 506, note 2.

2. Cf. supra, Ch. IV, p. 72.

3. Cf. supra, Ch. I, p. 10 and note 1.





develop the plot, shows clearly its extreme complication, which was the pride of Corneille. In the Examen he says: "... cette tragédie me semble être un peu plus à moi que celles qui l'ont précédée, à cause des incidents surprenants qui sont purement de mon invention.....". It is the "ingegno a trovare" of Castelvetro, the "difficulté vaincue", in Corneille's terminology. Up to Rodogune, Corneille had made a very real and conscious effort to fulfill Aristotelian requirements, but in this tragedy, so truly his own, we find him entirely under the inspiration of his more natural guide, Castelvetro. (1) Even now, however, we shall find that Corneille continues his careful observation of the Unities.

After this detailed discussion of the plot, we may speak of the characters more briefly. The relation between the action, which is psychological, and the characters, is so close that in tracing the one we have necessarily presented the salient features of the second. Despite the name 'Rodogune', the chief protagonist of the tragedy is very obviously Cleopatra. Corneille explains why he chose Rodogune rather than Cleopatra for the title of the play (2): he sought to avoid confusion with the famous Cleopatra of Egypt. The character of this ambitious, unscrupulous mother, is one of Corneille's most powerful portrayals of the Human Will, exerted this time in criminal directions, yet none the less admirable for its very strength.

Corneille makes it perfectly clear that he intends for us to

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1. Cf. supra, Ch. II, p. <sup>32</sup>.
  2. Cf. Avertissement to Rodogune.





admire Cleopatra. In the first act, Laonice disposes the reader somewhat in favor of the Queen, by softening the narration of Cleopatra's hasty marriage with her husband's brother, and again by putting a "dit-on" in the accusation of murder (ll. 257, 258; 263):

Et changeant à regret son amour en horreur,  
Elle abandonne tout à sa juste fureur.  
-----  
Le Roi meurt, et, dit-on, par la main de la Reine;  
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The second act cannot but change any kindly emotions we might have admitted for Cleopatra, yet we are struck with awe, constantly increased during the succeeding acts, at this tremendous force of Will. Cleopatra is the perfected Medea of the earlier period. (1) Even more completely than Medea, who is carried away at the end of that tragedy by a Deus ex Machina, Cleopatra represents the wreck of a sublime will-power misdirected. This later depiction of the criminal Will also gains from the fact that it stands out against a more psychological background without so much external action and mechanism as in Médée. Just as we found that Aristotle reduced the story of Medea to a second or third rate rank among tragic themes, so, for the same reasons, Cleopatra would be rejected from the perfect tragedy. The only Aristotelian element in this character is the tragic end to which she comes.

Rodogune is a rather colorless figure next to Cleopatra, nor is she Aristotelian, for she lacks the required hamartia. Although

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1. Cf. supra, Ch. IV, pp. 72 ff.





she threatens the life of Cleopatra, we are made conscious all along that she has no real intention of pursuing her threat to its accomplishment. Corneille has worked out this scene very carefully, to preserve Rodogune from the accusation of unnatural hatred. Compare such lines as 996 ff.:

Ce coeur vous est acquis après le diadème,  
Princes: mais gardez-vous de le rendre à lui-même.  
Vous y renoncerez peut-être pour jamais,  
Quand je vous aurai dit à quel prix je le mets.

And again, ll. 1013, 1014:

Mais quand j'aurai parlé, si vous vous en plaignez,  
J'atteste tous les Dieux que vous m'y contraignez,

It would have been out of character for Rodogune to have persisted in the killing of Cleopatra, and Corneille avoided such error.

Ll. 1220 ff. reassures us entirely:

Votre refus est juste autant que ma demande:  
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Je voudrais vous haïr s'il (1) m'avoit obéi;  
Et je n'estime pas l'honneur d'une vengeance  
Jusqu'à vouloir d'un crime être la récompense.

To have made of Rodogune also an ambitious aspirant to the throne would have injured the symmetry of the characters: it was necessary for Rodogune to be pliable and less strong-willed than her terrible enemy.

Antiochus and Séleucus both lack any very dramatic qualities—they are so manifestly secondary characters. They merely furnish the necessary foils to Cleopatra's machinations. They retain, however, the rational elements of the Cornelian characters. We are reminded of the stoicism of Curiace when we read these lines of

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1. Votre amour.





Séleucus (ll. 202 ff.):

Je le voudrai du moins, mon frère, et c'est assez;  
Et ma raison sur moi gardera tant d'empire.  
Que je désavouerais mon coeur s'il en soupire.

It is significant also that a comparison with Curiace should suggest itself, for we saw in our study of Horace, that Curiace was only a secondary character: similarly Séleucus in Rodogune. Antiochus is somewhat more developed in the play, although in reality he is but a tool by which certain psychological reactions are provoked in Rodogune and Cleopatra. (Cf. Act IV, sc. 1, l. 1210; IV, 3. ll. 1354-1358). It is not until Act IV that Antiochus is definitely made more important than Séleucus, and before the opening of Act V, Séleucus has been killed, and the field is left to Antiochus, who has the last words of the tragedy. There is, however, nothing of the Corneillian hero in Antiochus; the 'hero' of the tragedy, so to speak, is Cleopatra.

It will not be necessary to discuss Katharsis in connection with Rodogune, for in our section on Plot, we have already indicated that it was of the usual type, arousing not Pity or Fear, but Admiration. It is indeed natural that this play which was so peculiarly Corneille's own, should exemplify to a very high degree, his theory of Admiration.

Nor will it be necessary to devote many words to the Unities. It is perhaps surprising that in this tragedy Corneille has still the same deference for the Unity of Time. The very first line repeats twice the 'ce jour' idea, which is echoed in a variety of expressions (ce grand jour, ce soir, cet heureux jour, le même jour, etc.) throughout the tragedy. Towards the close of the play,





Corneille hastens the action in two places (ll. 1494, 1495):

Souvent qui tarde trop se laisse prévenir.  
Allons chercher le temps d'immoler mes victimes.

And ll. 1596, 1597:

Le temps presse, .....  
Madame, hâtons donc ces glorieux moments:

But in both cases these mentions of time are psychologically apt at the moment and have no flavor of a reminder to the public that the play is "within the rules". Because of the extreme complication of plot, Corneille may have deemed it expedient to protect himself thoroughly on the side of the Unity of Time. *that the Unity of Time served as a valuable check* And on the other hand, it may be said with all justice to Corneille's romanesque tendencies which might have led him directly back to the Cid.

The Unity of Place is the conventional 'palais royal' of which sufficient has been said in the preceding chapters.

The Unity of Action is excellent, as has been hinted in our comments on Plot, for the subject is more psychological than in any other of his plays, not excepting Polyeucte, and there are no episodes nor episodic characters in the background.

In Rodogune we have found the exemplification of Corneille's theory of Verisimilitude, expressed a few years later in the Au Lecteur of Héraclius: "le sujet d'une belle tragédie doit n'être pas vraisemblable". (1) Rodogune is the first play in which Corneille took a little-known plot from the old historical chronicles and shaped it to suit the requirements of Tragedy according to his own theories. We have but to read the Avertissement to

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1. CF. infra, Ch. XII, p. 215.





the play, to see the changes Corneille permitted himself as regards the historical facts. In history, Demetrius, the first husband of Cleopatra, actually married Rodogune, but still mindful perhaps of the accusation brought against Chimene, Corneille portrayed it as only a projected marriage, so that the two sons might more fittingly aspire to the hand of the Princess. Likewise, in history, Cleopatra married Antiochus out of spite; Corneille made it a matter of necessity because of her reduced military strength. And there follows in the Avertissement a long list of the other changes, some important, others minor, ending in the 'denouement' itself, which Corneille modified to the extent of having Cleopatra drink the poison of her own accord, rather than having Antiochus guilty of the murder of his own mother.

Yet all these changes might be accepted, since the story is so little known, and the general framework is preserved, which is Aristotle's sole requirement. But the lack of Verisimilitude is particularly noticeable in connection with the characters. Rodogune is par excellence the play to which Lemaitre's comment on Pompée would apply; the characters are indeed "simplifiés à outrance et figés dans une seule attitude unique." Cleopatra is the incarnation of Ambition. The other characters seem colorless for the very reason that their psychology is not rounded out. Rodogune herself is merely the weak toy of royal dissensions. The two Princes are shown only as lovers of Rodogune; they do not seek vengeance for their father's death, nor do they make any effort to





gain the throne. Whereas, in the plot, the action is largely psychological, in the characters, psychology is utterly sacrificed to the abstraction. Rodogune is the tragedy of Ambition, as Horace was the tragedy of Patriotism, and Cinna of Magnanimity. The characters necessarily lose any true resemblance to life, any universality, any possible Verisimilitude.

Rodogune fits perfectly between Pompée and Héraclius. As we saw in a preceding chapter, Pompée already reintroduced the romanesque plot, and characters lacking in psychology. Rodogune is far superior to Pompée in that the action, though eminently romanesque, is psychological, and can thus be handled within the bounds set for tragedy. After Rodogune, we shall find in Héraclius the most complicated of all the plots Corneille 'invented', and which reminds one of his earliest manner, in Clitandre. With Rodogune we have definitely reached the turning-point in Corneille's dramatic method. History had first helped him to eliminate the romanesque, the tragi-comic, from Tragedy (Horace, Cinna): now, by seeking out the unknown, extraordinary plots offered by history, Corneille brought back that very romanesque which it had been his greatest honor to banish from tragedy. So Héraclius, Don Sanche, Pertharite, present all the worst excesses of the romanesque plot and un-psychological characters.





## CHAPTER XI - THÉODORE

In 1645, nearly three years after Polyeucte, Corneille again presented a tragedy based upon a martyrdom, this time of a woman. (1) Contrary to the fortunes of Polyeucte, which we have considered to be the most perfect of Corneille's tragedies, Théodore was a complete failure. Corneille himself says at the outset of the Epître: "la représentation de cette tragédie n'a pas eu grand éclat...." This failure was attributed in large part to the idea of prostitution which was the threat constantly held before Théodore throughout the play. Of this attitude of the public, Corneille says in the Epître: "et certes il y a de quoi congratuler à la pureté de notre théâtre, de voir qu'une histoire qui fait le plus bel ornement du second livre des Vierges de saint Ambroise, se trouve trop licencieuse pour y être supportée."

But the failure of Théodore on the stage was not wholly due to its subject. Corneille had combined in this tragedy two historical legends, entirely distinct. Both came from the Lives of the Saints; the one may have been suggested to Corneille, along with that of Polyeucte, in the Italian tragedies of Bartolomei, and the other had already been used in the obscure Sainte Agnès of the sieur d'Aves. It was in this latter play that Corneille found the characters of Marcelle, Placide, and Flavie, who take

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1. Cf. supra, Ch. VIII, p. 156, footnote 2.





so important a role in Théodore. The results of this fusion of different elements in the plot were most unfortunate: the role of Théodore herself was necessarily lessened, and Didyme is relegated entirely to the last acts of the play, except for two or three furtive remarks which may be considered as anticipatory of his role. The love intrigue and the rivalry of Placide and Didyme, which alone would have justified combining these two plots, and which would have introduced a truly dramatic element into the play, are entirely lost sight of. Since Corneille saw in Théodore and Didyme the principal characters, (as the title would indicate), it must be admitted that the roles of Marcelle and Placide are over-developed. This necessarily harms the unity of action, a criticism which Corneille evidently anticipated, for he endeavored, not over skilfully, and not with great success, to foreshadow the role of Didyme. Compare ll. 93, 94:

Sans doute elle (Théodore) aime ailleurs, et s'im-  
pute à bonheur  
De préférer Didyme au fils du gouverneur.

It is perhaps significant that in this first mention of Didyme, he is given preference over Placide. Although repeated again in l. 388, by Theodore herself:

J'honorerois Placide, et j'aimerois Didyme,

this predominance is not made clear in the action until the end of Act IV. Line 438 is an evident reference to Didyme:

J'en trouverai peut-être un plus puissant que lui;

but it is really equivocal, for Corneille would have it appear that Théodore is thinking of divine aid, and yet the audience is to





understand it in a more material sense. The same thing is done also in ll. 946 ff.:

Vous (1) n'êtes pas celui dont Dieu veut s'y servir:  
Il saura bien sans vous en susciter un autre,  
Dont le bras moins puissant, mais plus saint que le  
vôtre,  
Par un rôle plus pur se fera mon appui,  
Sans porter ses désirs sur un bien tout à lui.

Yet here again it is not clear that Théodore has in mind Didyme. This is, in fact, very improbable, and Corneille has interposed his own knowledge of later action, at a point when his characters are still unaware of their future fate. Whether or not we consider that Corneille may have inserted such passages after the first writing of the play, it is certain that they were inspired only after he had the details of his plot clearly in mind. But these sparse and hidden references to the role are in nowise sufficient to prepare us for the magnanimous action of Didyme in saving Théodore. Placide's imminent death interests us quite as much as the martyrdom of Didyme. So that Corneille's error in Théodore was double, as Mauvette has stated (2), first in choosing this subject for a tragedy, and second, in not having held to the subject once he had chosen it. If we seek to answer the obvious question why Corneille combined these two legends, we may find it in the character of Théodore: Corneille may have recognized that this heroine was not dramatic, and had no tragic quality, no tragic weakness. This character pleased Corneille, for it gave him an excellent opportunity to present again a tragedy in which

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1. Placide.

2. Loc. cit. p. 569.





Admiration was the chief element. But unlike Polyeucte, Théodore has no human attachments, and therefore no struggle to make in accepting martyrdom. Therefore Corneille developed the more dramatic Marcelle and created the rôle of Placide. Both these characters are portrayed carefully throughout the tragedy, to the detriment, as we have said, of the real chief protagonists, Théodore and Didyme.

From the structural point of view, Théodore presents much that is of interest to us. The plot is developed skilfully, and the suspense is maintained, through a long series of reversals of fortune, to the very end of the tragedy, and even beyond, we might say, for Placide's death is only imminent and not an accomplished fact at the end of the play. The 'dénouement' is the most Aristotelian of any of the tragedies we have studied, for of the principal characters two were murdered (Théodore and Didyme) and the two stronger ones commit suicide (Marcelle and Placide).

There is however one point of plot which we must consider: is there a double peril? After Didyme had enabled Théodore to escape, there was no external necessity for her to deliver herself up again to Marcelle. Can we say, as for Horace, that there was an internal, psychological necessity, which drove Théodore to martyrdom? I think we can, for Théodore had no longing for life, and death held no terrors for her. Martyrdom was the only psychological ending for this unhuman character. There was





also a dramatic necessity which justified this return: a drama is not ended until each of the main characters is brought to a state which has an air of permanency. Théodore could not wander indefinitely, and the audience should be given a more satisfactory termination of her trials. The fact of the historical nature of this 'dénouement' cannot be adduced in its justification, for the same objection would be made as in the Cid: if the historical ending cannot be held to, in conformity with the rules of dramatic art, the subject should not be admitted to Tragedy. This objection has already been preferred against Théodore on other grounds, but it does not appear that the 'denouement' should be rejected.

The plot of Théodore is truly Aristotelien, in its development and in its outcome. But the characters are not. Théodore is a saint, a martyr, therefore perfect, and would be rejected from Tragedy by Aristotle just as Polyeucte would have been. She has no resemblance with human beings, and partakes of none of their joys or weaknesses. She is indeed "une statue de marbre au geste immobile". (1) Didyme, likewise, is a faultless character, and if he saves Theodore from infamy, we have the feeling that he would have done the same for any Christian sister; his love for Théodore is not sufficiently developed to make it dramatically interesting. Placide is an abstraction, constantly wavering between his love for Théodore and his hatred for Marcelle. He never acts; he remains motionless, bewildered, un-

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1. Jules Lemaître in Petit de Julleville, Hist. de la Langue et de la Litt. Fr. IV, 304.





til all hope is past and he then kills himself. His only vital connection with the action of the plot, is that it is his love for Théodore which kindles Marcelle's hatred against the Christian maiden. Alone, the character of Marcelle is well portrayed, and prepared for the greater figure of Cléopâtre in Rodogune.

It would seem as though Corneille had neglected every opportunity for dramatic action in this tragedy. This was due to Corneille's conception of his subject: as in Polyeucte, he sought to portray the perfect character, and that alone. The fundamental error was that Corneille relied too entirely on the power of Admiration, to carry an audience through anything, to the final martyrdom. The perfection of Théodore, and the lofty nobility of Didyme and of Placide, were ever before his mind, and he too often neglected dramatic considerations.

In spite of its close affinity with Polyeucte in subject, Théodore is far more akin to <sup>its predecessor</sup> Pompee, ~~its immediate predecessor~~. The characters lack subtle psychology, and each reacts to but one stimulus. The action is becoming more complicated, the subject less historical, and closer to the invented plot which we shall find in Don Sanche. Rigal has stated the fate of Théodore succinctly but accurately when he writes (1): "Théodore a fait une lourde chute sur le théâtre et il faut l'avouer, cela n'était que justice, car le sujet en est insupportable, beaucoup d'incidents en sont horribles, les principaux personnages n'agissent point." And yet Jules Lemaitre writes: "...je demeure persuadé, par ce que je sais du reste de son théâtre, que, dans le moment qu'il écrivit Théodore, Corneille dut croire qu'il écrivait son

1. De Jodelle à Molière, p. 285.





chef d'oeuvre." This is entirely possible, for Corneille's own ideal of Tragedy, as he stated it a few years later, included the two elements which loomed largest in Théodore: a complicated, romanesque plot, and Admiration of character. These two elements were given greater development in his next play, Rodogune, which because of its romanesque qualities and grandiose figures, always remained Corneille's favorite play in all his repertory.





dire que c'est un heureux original dont il s'est fait beaucoup de belles copies sitôt qu'il a paru." We have no means of knowing what copies Corneille had in mind, but it is clear that the reference was not to Calderón's play which appeared only some eleven or twelve years later.

Héraclius met with reasonable success, but Corneille himself makes the following admission, with his usual frankness: "j'ai vu de fort bons esprits, et des personnes des plus qualifiées de la cour, se plaindre de ce que sa représentation fatiguoit autant l'esprit qu'une étude sérieuse."(1)

The Emperor Phocas had usurped the throne of Maurice whom he had slain, together (presumably), with all his children, save one daughter, Pulchérie. At the opening of the play, Phocas is troubled by a rumor that Héraclius, a son of Maurice, lives and is about to march against him, the usurper. This rumor proves to be true enough, but it takes the five acts of the drama to straighten matters out and restore the Empire to Héraclius. Léontine, the gouvernante of the children of the Emperor Maurice, had contrived to save Héraclius from the general slaughter, by sacrificing in his place her own son. To insure further the life of this precious survivor, Léontine made a second exchange, giving Héraclius to Phocas as his own son Martian, and keeping Martian as her son Léonce. It is through two revealing notes, the one left by the Emperor Maurice before his death, and the other by the Em-

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1. Cf. Examen.





press Constantine, that the double exchange is finally disclosed. The usurper Phocas is killed, thus leaving Héraclius to reign in his rightful kingdom. Pulchérie marries Martien whom she had secretly loved even when she thought him the humble Léonce. Héraclius is to marry Eudoxe, daughter of Léontine, who is now honored as the one who preserved the infant son of Maurice.

Melodramatic and romanesque to an extraordinary degree, this plot at once reminds us of Clitandre, that extravaganza of Corneille's first period.

But instead of reverting to Comedy or Tragi-comedy, Corneille has now adapted to Tragedy all the qualities of his earliest manner: extremely complicated plot, with double disguises, revealing notes, equivocal remarks, -- all these are used freely in Héraclius. And if we consider the 'dénouement', we shall find that it is quite in keeping with the tragi-comedy traditions: a double marriage, death of the villain, and reward of the virtuous.

Such a plot fails in one of the first of Aristotle's requirements: that it should be of such proportion that one could embrace the whole at one time in the memory. This, if not impossible, is manifestly extremely difficult for such a plot as that of Héraclius. There are so many antecedents which must be narrated during the course of the first act, that the plot is hindered from moving freely forward. The plot has the required Reversals of fortune, with Recognition, but the number of reversals and the great delay in the recognition makes the plot weak, -- it has the weakness





of its very quality. Nor is the 'dénouement' Aristotelian, for there is no killing except that of the villain, which is the 'dénouement' best suited to the vulgar taste, according to Aristotle, but not worthy of noble Tragedy.

While based on an historical legend, as Corneille tells us in the Preface Au Lecteur, this plot is fundamentally<sup>different</sup> from the Roman tragedies, for the history of a Baronius was not as well known as were the legends of classical antiquity. This left Corneille free to change far more than minor details, and in fact, the pivotal point of Héraclius, the successful preservation of the infant son of Maurice, is fictitious. In Baronius, this child was handed over to Phocas shortly after the murder of the others. Corneille has used this legend of a distant land as though it were his own invention. Since there was no popular acquaintance with this story, it was the poet's right to adapt it to the necessities of the tragic stage. But by his complicated plot, his heroic characters, and his non-tragic 'dénouement', Corneille did not make of the story an Aristotelian tragedy, but a romanesque, heroic drama.

As for the characters, Corneille has conceived them in accord with the romanesque plot. Héraclius is the perfect hero, with no flaw; even when he doubts his own identity, he never betrays his high station by any unworthy action. Pulchérie is a worthy sister to such a noble brother; she continues the group of





Cornelian heroines and steadfastly refuses to marry Martian, despite her love, until Phocas is killed; nor does she at any point waver in this purpose. Martian, son of the usurper, has some of the traits of his father, -- "un peu de mauvais sang", as Corneille puts it, -- but these have been nearly obliterated by his education away from his father. He is not Aristotelian, for he has no fatal flaw to lead him to his ruin. Not even the crime of his father is held over his head; he triumphs at the end, since he wins the hand of Pulchérie, with her own consent and that of her brother. Phocas, while he is the motivating force of the external action of the play, like Félix in Polyeucte, is not one of the principal characters. He, however, comes more nearly under Aristotelian requirements, since he wavers and knows not what to decide. Yet his whole standard is ambition, which immediately detracts from his role the necessary goodness, and since he is not strong in his decisions, he has no greatness in his crime, as has Cléopâtre in Rodogune or the earlier Médée.

Since the outcome is happy, not tragic, we know already that there can be no Aristotelian Katharsis. Fear and pity are alike lacking in such a tragedy: Héraclius faces Empire or Death with equal calm; Pulchérie is ready to recognize and esteem as a brother either Prince who proves himself such, ready to reign or die, and to defend herself at all events against a husband whom honor forbids her to accept. For Martian we do not fear, since





his blindness is such that he assumes the noble courage of a true Héraclius, and his character is so weak that he adapts himself readily to all changes of fortune. Eudoxe perfects the symmetry of the play, but is no more needed for the action than the Infanta or Sabine in their respective plays; yet Corneille has well incorporated her role in this play.

What becomes of the Unities in this crowded play? Unity of Action was difficult to maintain because of the many narrations, but Héraclius is always before the audience. The Unity of Time is extremely crowded, for the events necessary for the understanding of the plot cover twenty years in fact. Yet Corneille contrived, as in the Cid, and indeed with better success, to bring the crisis and termination of all the threads of action into one day. The references to the time element in the text are very few. In l. 541 there occurs the expression dans ce jour; in l. 887, en ce grand jour; in l. 915, cette heureuse journée; in l. 1510, avant la fin du jour, which is one of the most striking instances, and near the close of the play, ll. 1816 ff.:

Madame: dans le cours d'une seule journée  
 Je suis Héraclius, Léonce et Martian;  
 Je sors d'un empereur, d'un triton, d'un tyran.  
 De tous trois ce désordre en un jour me fait naître.

These few instances show that even at this late date, ten years after the appearance of the Sentimens sur le Cid, Corneille is still conscious of the weighty rule of the Unity of Time. It is, in fact, at this time, rather than ten years previously, that the Unity of Time was finding general acceptance. The Unity of Place is





the conventional antechamber of the nondescript palace, to which each group comes for their respective conversations.

After the outline of the plot, it is superfluous to state that Verisimilitude is utterly lacking in such a play. It is in the Préface Au Lecteur of this tragedy, that we find the famous sentence: "...quoique peut-être on voudra prendre cette proposition pour un paradoxe, je ne craindrai point d'avancer que le sujet d'une belle tragédie doit n'être pas vraisemblable." Alongside of this fallacy, Corneille states another: "L'action étant vraie . . . . , il ne faut plus s'informer si elle est vraisemblable, étant certain que toutes les vérités sont recevables dans la poésie." It is evident that by 1647, Corneille has gathered most of the material and made most of the reflections which are to be used in the Examens and Discours of 1660. By the time of Héraclius, he is entirely freed from Aristotelian doctrine and gives way to the natural bent of his genius, toward the romanesque and the heroic. As Jules Lemaitre expresses it (1), "Héraclius serait le roi des mélodrames, si ce n'était un mélodrame asservi, contre toute raison, aux règles de la tragédie." Alone, the Unities still hold Corneille bound to earth. It is significant and curious that this least Aristotelian, least rational bond, should be the only remaining link between the theory of Aristotle and the practice of Corneille.

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1. Petit de Julleville, op. cit., IV, 308.





### CHAPTER VIII--DON SANCHE D'ARAGON

Héraclius was followed, in 1649, by Don Sanche d'Aragon, which Corneille called a 'comédie héroïque'(1), a title which it has retained, and with reason. This title was clearly a subterfuge, for Corneille could not call it a tragedy, nor was he entirely willing to term it a tragi-comedy. Don Sanche partakes indeed of both 'genres', and just as tragi-comedy is itself an intermediate 'genre' between tragedy and comedy, so the heroic comedy may be said to stand between tragi-comedy and tragedy: the elements of tragedy are more to the fore than the elements of comedy, in this hybrid form, the heroic comedy. Don Sanche has been treated fully and excellently by Rigal, who devotes to it a chapter in his volume, De Jodelle à Molière. In this discussion Rigal points out first that Don Sanche presents the strongest possible contrast to Polyeucte, which he had treated in the preceding chapter, as representing the highest point in Corneille's classicism. In the chapter on Don Sanche, Rigal analyzes in detail the dual nature of this play: how, by its romanesque, unreal and complex action, by the great role assigned to chance (the possible improbable of Aristotle), and by its happy ending, Don Sanche is closely akin to Clitandre and quite in

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1. The title 'comédie héroïque' was used for Cyrano de Bergerac, which is the most notable example of the genre on the modern stage. The term 'comédie héroïque' suggests somewhat the novelistic technique employed in these dramas.





the traditions of the tragi-comedy; and on the other hand, how this action is made worthy of tragedy by the simplicity of its presentation, (adherence to the unities of time and place (1) ), and above all, by that 'grandeur d'âme' so essentially Cornelian, and which, combined with its natural product, Admiration, constituted Corneille's greatest contribution to the dramatic art, by instituting a new type of tragedy in addition to those sanctioned by Aristotle. Thus, in so far as Don Sanche has, to a high degree, 'grandeur d'âme' - Rigal has shown by quotation, how all the characters react to their nobler sentiments - and produces through its characters, through the chief protagonists, Isabelle and Carlos, in particular, the Cornelian Admiration, we must consider it as belonging to the series of tragedies, and in spite of its differing title, as a companion piece to Héraclius. One factor alone justified Corneille in according to Héraclius the name of tragedy, which he denied Don Sanche: the historical nature of its subject. How frail a thread marks the distinction between tragedy and tragi-comedy or heroic comedy! A wholly unfamiliar historical incident, altered in all but the barest facts, however improbable, can bestow the name of 'tragedy'; but an action of the poet's fancy, though endowed with the names of kings and queens, and motivated by no more improbable circumstances than its historical rival, must be content with the name of 'comedy', tempered by the epithet 'heroic'!

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1. Rigal mentions only place, but Unity of Time is also observed. Cf. De Jodelle à Molière, p. 275.





It is needless to present here again the complicated development of another romanesque plot. Suffice it to say that Don Sanche, like Héraclius, is actuated by a mistaken identity: Carlos, who thinks himself the son of a humble fisherman, is revealed at the close of Act V as the rightful heir to the throne of Aragon. As in Héraclius, this revelation makes possible the happy ending, by which Isabelle, queen of Castille, may marry Carlos whom she secretly loved, and Elvire may marry Don Alvar without sacrificing her love for Carlos, who, as Don Sanche, is shown to be her brother.

If Corneille did not return in Don Sanche to the pure tragi-comedy, it was due, as Rigal has pointed out, to the fact that the two great elements, henceforth to be known as the Cornelian attributes, 'grandeur d'âme' and Admiration, had become an intrinsic part of Corneille's dramatic method. These he retained in plots of his own invention, just as for his historical tragedies he had sought out those subjects which would lend themselves to such treatment.

It is not necessary that we should seek Aristotelian elements in this play, since we have already placed it in a class with Héraclius. We saw in the preceding chapter that Héraclius had no single Aristotelian quality left, except the Unities, which are pseudo-Aristotelian. The same may be said of Don Sanche, in which Corneille went even further than in Héraclius. He chose for Don Sanche a wholly imaginary subject, and thus lost the support of history for his plot, which was improbable, both in its elements and in its development. Don Sanche is very clearly the ancestor of the Hernani, or still more of the





Ruy Blas of the romantic school. The similarities between this romanesque play of Corneille and Hugo's romantic dramas are astonishing, as pointed out in Rigal's discussion. All of this leads us again to the conclusion already anticipated in our chapter on Andogune, and which we have seen borne out in Héraclius, that Corneille has now, by 1647 and 1649, re-introduced into tragedy the romanesque and the improbable, in plot and character. He has substituted for the true tragic actions, a false, self-imposed duty, which lacks the human interest of the situations presented in the Cid, or Horace, or Polyeucte.

But whereas, in Héraclius, the complication of the action is the outstanding feature, and the romanesque plot entirely overshadows the characters, in Don Sanche the spectator or reader is not burdened with a multiplicity of incident or antecedents necessary for the understanding of the plot. Corneille himself felt it impossible to give an adequate 'Argument' for Héraclius, but three pages (1) give a clear account of the plot of Don Sanche. In this play, Corneille's primary interest was in his new theory of Admiration, which he did not dare proclaim until the Préface Au Lecteur of Nicomède, but of which he was fully conscious in Don Sanche. Carlos constantly arouses Admiration, never pity or fear. Ample quotations have been given from this role by Rigal; of these we shall repeat only the most important. There are two passages which indicate sufficiently the hero's character:

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1. Marty-Laveaux, V, 411-414.





Je ne veux rien devoir à ceux qui m'ont fait maître,  
 Et suis assez connu sans les faire connoître.  
 Mais pour en quelque sorte obéir à vos lois,  
 Seigneur, pour mes parents je nomme mes exploits;  
 Ma valeur est ma race, et mon bras est mon père.(1)

Here Carlos shows himself fully conscious of his true worth and nobility, but that these are not the words of ambitious pride is made clear by the lines Carlos addresses to the Queen in the following act:

Je vous aime, madame, et vous estime en reine;  
 Et quand j'aurois des feux dignes de votre haine,  
 Si votre âme, sensible à ces indignes feux,  
 Se pouvoit oublier jusqu'à souffrir mes vœux;  
 Si par quelque malheur que je ne puis comprendre,  
 Du trône jusqu'à moi je la voyois descendre,  
 Commencant aussitôt à vous moins estimer,  
 Je cesserois sans doute aussi de vous aimer.(2)

Though conscious always of his valor, and a fearless soldier, Carlos is a severe master to himself, and recognizes that he can never rise above his supposedly low birth. This is the purest Cornelianism, and the character of Don Sanche prepares for Nicomède who, as we shall see in the following chapter, is the complete expression of Corneille's ideal character. In Don Sanche the 'grandeur d'âme' is still overcrowded by the romanesque action. Don Sanche has a certain position in the evolution of Corneille's art, as being the natural transition from Héraclius, a play in which romanesque action predominates, to Nicomède, in which 'grandeur d'âme' stands forth in all its power.

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1. Ll. 249-253.

2. Ll. 529-536.





#### CHAPTER XIV - NICOMÈDE

Some time between January, 1650, and March, 1651, appeared Nicomède, entitled 'tragédie'. Unlike its predecessor, Nicomède met with considerable success, augmented perhaps by the incidents of the Fronde; and again unlike Don Sanche, this new play took its subject from history. After the failure of Don Sanche, Corneille made a sudden return to Roman history, and presented a political subject, showing Rome's colonial policy. In the Préface Au Lecteur, written but a few months after the play itself, Corneille says, "Mon principal but a été de peindre la politique des Romains au dehors, et comme ils agissoient impérieusement avec les rois leurs alliés; leurs maximes pour les empêcher de s'accroître, et les soins qu'il prenoient de traverser leur grandeur, quand elle commençoit à leur devenir suspecte à force de s'augmenter et de se rendre considérables par de nouvelles conquêtes". This was an ambitious program to be realized within the limits of a tragedy! And it was indeed a 'stroke of genius' as one critic has called it (1), that made of Nicomède a tragedy which fills worthily a place alongside of some of Corneille's best-known tragedies.

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1. Lanson, Histoire, p. 439.





Let us then analyze briefly the plot of this striking drama--for drama it is, not tragedy. Nicomède is the son of Prusias, king of Bithynia, by a first marriage, and the valiant disciple of his great teacher Hannibal. Nicomède is the rightful heir to the throne. The step-mother, Arsinoé, is jealous of Nicomède, on account of her own son Attale, whom she would like to place on the throne. Nicomède loves Laodice, queen of a neighboring country; if he married her, another great region would be brought under his rule. This marriage had in fact been arranged, inasmuch as the father of Laodice had agreed that she should marry the heir to the throne of Bithynia. Flaminius, the Roman ambassador, had brought Attale from Rome where he had been educated, and thus gained the sympathies of the mother. Flaminius had a double commission from Rome, the one to get possession of Hannibal, Rome's greatest enemy, and the second, to avert the marriage of Laodice and Nicomède, since that would put too much power into the hands of an enemy of Rome. The treacherous Arsinoé had already aided Flaminius in doing away with Hannibal, and the action of our play is devoted to the moral struggle between Nicomède on the one hand, and the combined efforts of Flaminius and Arsinoé on the other. Laodice and Attale, though mainstays in the action, are colorless figures, mere reflections of the moral greatness of Nicomède. Prusias similarly is a weak and even unwilling partisan of Flaminius in whom he fears the whole Roman people.

Nicomède has in his favor exceeding prowess and military glory, against which is set all the favor of Rome, represented





by Flaminius, and the cunning wiles of a jealous stepmother in behalf of his younger brother Attale. Arsinoé uses her favor with Prusias to make Attale king and to marry him to Laodice, in order that he may add to his kingdom hers also. But Laodice refuses to marry any other than Nicomède; the people revolt against having any other than Nicomède as king. And despite the treachery of Arsinoé and the diplomacy of Flaminius, seconded by the weakness of the cringing Prusias, Nicomède stands triumphant at the end of the play. He restores tranquility to the city, spares Prusias and Arsinoé, offers new kingdoms to Attale, and his alliance, but not allegiance, to the Roman emissary.

Thus this play, like its predecessors, is tragi-comic in its happy ending, and takes its place properly among the plays of Corneille's later manner. It owes its name of 'tragedy' to the historical nature of its subject, just as did Héraclius. But the lofty character of Nicomède arouses to the highest degree the tragic Admiration, and therefore this play belongs to the series of tragedies. Indeed, one may compare Nicomède very favorably with Cinna, for both presented what were essentially political subjects, and characters whose self-control, whose lofty dignity, were calculated to arouse our admiration. It will be recalled that Cinna lost somewhat because of its title, which put the leader of the conspirators before the Emperor, who was the real hero of the play, and resulted in a necessary shift of interest. This objection cannot be made against Nicomède. Like Nicomède, Cinna had a happy ending.





And like Nicomède, also, Cinna presented a purely political subject. If we recall our discussions of Cinna, we shall observe that all the objections were made then which can be made now against Nicomède: the characters lack psychology, the action consequently lacks interest. The character of Augustus is not that of a 'man like ourselves'; neither is that of Nicomède. The essential difference between Cinna and Nicomède is that all these features are much accentuated in the later play. In Cinna, the magnanimity of Augustus is shown up on one occasion only, whereas in Nicomède, the hero is portrayed as always magnanimous--a kind of superhuman being, who disdains all the meaner ways of mortals, and stands in calm, ironic dignity, bestowing honors all around him. We have no longer any waverings, any counsel scenes as in Cinna, no longer any vestige of human weakness. Nicomède is, par excellence, the tragedy of Admiration, the Cornelian tragedy. In it, the struggle is between 'grandeur d'âme' and 'la politique',--it is Corneille who thus names the forces of his drama in the Préface Au Lecteur--the individual against Rome, and it is the individual who wins, and offers his friendship to the Mistress of the World. The keynote of the role of Nicomède is given when he proclaims the great lesson of Hannibal (ll. 577, 578):

Non, mais il m'a surtout laissé ferme en ce point,  
D'estimer beaucoup Rome, et ne la craindre point.

When Corneille wrote Cinna, he had just written Horace, and was still striving for that classic perfection which he was to attain in Polyeucte. Just as in Horace, he chose again a





famous incident from one of the best known periods of Roman history. In writing Nicomède, Corneille had in mind Héraclius and Don Sanche, and the other plays that intervened between it and Cinna--all the romanesque plays, based on obscure legends very much altered, or invented entirely by the poet. With this different context, so to speak, it was quite natural that a similar subject should appear quite differently, at the two dates, and we may consider that from Corneille's own point of view, Nicomède came closer to the realization of his ideals than did Cinna, for Nicomède commands more Admiration, displays greater 'grandeur d'âme' than Augustus, and the character is more masterfully presented throughout the drama. From the Aristotelian point of view, for these same reasons, Nicomède is less of a tragedy than Cinna.

Our chief interest in Nicomède is the title role, since Nicomède embodies all of Corneille's ideals of the tragic hero. Corneille says of this play (1): "La tendresse et les passions, qui doivent être l'âme des tragédies, n'ont aucune part en celle-ci: la grandeur de courage (2) y règne seule, et regarde son malheur d'un oeil si dédaigneux qu'il n'en sauroit arracher une plainte. Elle y est combattue par la politique, et n'oppose à ses artifices qu'une prudence généreuse, qui marche à visage découvert, qui prévoit le péril sans s'émouvoir, et ne veut point d'autre appui que celui de sa vertu, et de l'amour qu'elle inspire dans les cœurs de tous les peuples".

By tracing the character of Nicomède through the play, we shall

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1. Au Lecteur.

2. The underlining is the writer's.





be able to grasp more completely the vast divergence between Aristotle and Corneille in the point of the tragic hero. The moral contest is stated in ll. 275, 276:

Et nous verrons ainsi qui fait mieux un brave homme,  
Des leçons d'Annibal, ou de celles de Rome,

and the shades of Hannibal are again introduced in ll. 663, 664:

Le maître qui prit soin d'instruire ma jeunesse  
Ne m'a jamais appris à faire une bassesse.

The type of irony and disdainful superiority in the character of Nicomède, is well indicated in ll. 709 ff.:

Voilà le vrai secret de faire Attale roi,  
Comme vous l'avez dit, sans rien prendre sur moi.  
La pièce est délicate, et ceux qui l'ont tissée  
A de si longs détours font une digne issue.  
Je n'y réponds qu'un mot, étant sans intérêt,  
Traitez cette princesse en reine comme elle est:  
-----  
Qu'elle seule en ces lieux d'elle-même dispose.

How well founded was Nicomède's confidence in Laodice, is shown by her words to Flaminius in ll. 909 ff. Flaminius has just hurled his thunderbolt:

Et Rome est aujourd'hui la maîtresse du monde.

Laodice answers:

La maîtresse du monde! Ah! vous me feriez peur,  
S'il ne s'en falloit pas l'Arménie et mon cœur,  
Si le grand Annibal n'avoit qui lui succède,  
S'il ne revivoit pas au prince Nicomède,  
Et s'il n'avoit laissé dans de si dignes mains  
L'infailible secret de vaincre les Romains.  
Un si vaillant disciple aura bien le courage  
D'en mettre jusqu'au bout les leçons en usage:  
L'Asie en fait l'épreuve, où trois sceptres conquis  
Font voir en quelle école il en a tant appris.

Nicomède reappears now with ironic remarks for Flaminius, ll. 927, 928:

Où Rome à ses agents donne un pouvoir bien large,  
Où vous êtes bien longs à faire votre charge,





and the rest of the scene continues in the same tone. The same irony, though a little milder, comes out in the three lines addressed to Attale (1026-1028):

C'est n'avoir pas perdu tout votre temps à Rome,  
Que vous savaiez ainsi défendre en galant homme:  
Vous avez de l'esprit, si vous n'avez de coeur.

Again, in the presence of Prusias and Arsinoé, after Arsinoé has treacherously begged clemency for Nicomède, he answers (ll. 1153 ff.):

De quoi, Madame? est-ce d'avoir conquis  
Trois sceptres, que ma porte expose à votre fils?  
D'avoir porté si loin vos armes dans l'Asie,  
Que même votre Rome en a pris jalousie?  
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Trop du grand Annibal pratiqué les maximes?  
S'il faut grâce pour moi, choisissez de mes crimes:  
Les voilà tous, Madame;-----

This is the big trial scene, in which Nicomède holds his own against the cunning and treacherous Arsinoé; in the following scene he bewilders the weak Prusias by threatening to insult Rome in the person of Flaminius. His last words in the scene are addressed to Flaminius, who is to take him to Rome as hostage:

Tout beau, Flaminius! je n'y suis pas encore:  
La route en est mal sûre, à tout considérer,  
Et qui m'y conduira pourra bien s'égarer.

This is typical of his character. Nicomède does not appear again before the last scene of the play, where he proclaims his triumph. His last words are for Flaminius, in which we see the conclusion of the central plot, Nicomède against Rome (ll. 1639 ff.):

Seigneur, à découvert, toute âme généreuse  
D'avoir notre amitié doit se tenir heureuse;  
Mais nous n'en voulons plus avec des dures lois  
Qu'elle jette toujours sur la tête des rois:  
Nous vous la demandons hors de la servitude,  
Ou le nom d'ennemi nous semblera moins rude.





Nicomède triumphs over individuals (Arsinoé, Prusias, Attale), and over the world (Rome); he is always master of himself, without a moment's struggle--the perfected type of the Cornelian hero of the Will, and the antipodes of the Aristotelian 'man like ourselves' who falls into error through his human frailty.

Even Polyeucte, the Christian martyr, had a struggle to make, to overcome his mortal love for Pauline; and Polyeucte dies at the close of the tragedy. After Polyeucte, Corneille wrote Théodore in which there was no human attachment, only moral perfection, but Théodore was also killed. Nicomède transcends both these from Corneille's point of view, since this hero conquers by his own indomitable Will. Through his invincible will-power, Nicomède is not tragic, nor is he indeed dramatic. As Lanson has excellently stated it (1): "----plus la volonté est pure, moins la tragédie sera dramatique: ce qui est dramatique, ce sont les défaites ou les demi-succès, ou les lentes et coûteuses victoires de la volonté----". Thus Corneille has definitely set character, and 'character portrayal' above action; in this he opposed the fundamental doctrines of Aristotle. And in the Au Lecteur, he now formulates this new type of tragedy which he sets alongside of the accepted types. The passage reads: "Ce héros de ma façon sort un peu des règles de la tragédie, en ce qu'il ne cherche point à faire pitié par l'excès de ses malheurs; mais le succès a montré que la fermeté des grands coeurs, qui n'excite que de l'admiration dans l'âme du spectateur, est quelquefois aussi

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1. Histoire, p. 439.





agréable que la compassion que notre art nous commande de mendier pour leurs misères". It is not until the Examen that Aristotle is definitely named, but it is entirely clear that the Poetics were in Corneille's mind when he wrote these lines in the Préface Au Lecteur.

For the purpose of our investigation, this brief study of Nicomède has been only negative. But it has been none the less profitable, for it prepares us for the formulation of some parts of Corneille's doctrine in the Discours and Examens.





## CHAPTER XV - PERTHARITE

The last of the plays we are to consider, Pertharite, was presented probably in 1651. But its success was so slight that it was not played more than twice, although there were some few private performances of the tragedy. Corneille felt keenly this failure, and says in the Préface Au Lecteur, "la mauvaise réception que le public<sup>a</sup> faite à cet ouvrage m'avertit qu'il est temps que je sonne la retraite -----". Il vaut mieux que je prenne congé de moi-même que d'attendre qu'on me le donne tout à fait; et il est juste qu'après vingt années de travail, je commence à m'apercevoir que je deviens trop vieux pour être encore à la mode". This last observation is singularly true, and had Corneille held to this resolution to withdraw from the stage, he would not have faced the humiliation of his later failures. (1)

Let us analyze briefly the elements of this last play, which caused Corneille to retire for a period of seven years. Rodelinde, widow of Pertharite, who is supposedly dead, and her son (2), are captives of Grimoald the usurper. Grimoald falls in love with Rodelinde, but she wishes to remain true to Pertharite. Grimoald had already pledged himself to

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1. Cf. Conclusion, p. .

2. The son does not appear in the play.





Eduige, sister of Pertharite, who is infuriated at his faithlessness. She seeks by vague promises of marriage to procure the services of Garibalde against Grimoald, but Garillade, in love with Eduige, seeks rather to hasten the marriage of Grimoald and Rodelinde. Rodelinde finally consents to marry Grimoald on the condition that he should kill her son, in order that he shall be despised by his people. At this point, the lost Pertharite appears to reclaim his wife. Grimoald will not believe his eyes and thinks it is an imposture. Garibalde, the villain of the play, wishes to marry Eduige, not for love of her, but because she holds the right to the throne. He therefore endeavors further to estrange Grimoald from Eduige, and attributes to her this ruse of the resuscitated Pertharite to draw Grimoald from Rodelinde. Grimoald menaces Pertharite with death. Rodelinde renews her promises to Pertharite not to marry Grimoald. A faithful follower allows Pertharite to escape, but the treacherous Garibalde again captures him. In the fray, Garibalde is killed and Pertharite is brought before Grimoald by soldiers. In the meantime, Grimoald has returned to his first love, Eduige, who now refuses him unless he will release her brother. When Pertharite appears before Grimoald, the usurper astonishes everyone by restoring to the rightful king his throne and his wife, pledging his faith to Pertharite as his king and to Eduige as his wife.

One immediately notices similarities with the plot of Andromaque and almost as quickly, one recognizes the fundamental differences. Andromaque is a great classical tragedy and Pertharite was a failure. If we compare the 'denouements'





of the two plays, we shall recall that with Racine two of the four main characters suffer violent deaths, and Orestes is mad in the closing scene--an ending of the true tragic type; whereas Corneille has the villain killed and then resorts to an improbable reversal in the character of Grimoald, which results in a general reconciliation, with the wife restored to her husband, the fiancée to her lover,--the same type of ending, though far less well motivated, which we found in Héraclius.

The plot is well constructed and the action well motivated throughout the first acts of the play, but the whole is ruined, from the viewpoint of tragedy, by the 'dénouement'. We have suggested in the discussion of Héraclius that Corneille was brought to these happy 'dénouements' for two reasons: the one, that the theater public was well pleased to see virtue rewarded; the other that his own conception of his characters was that they should be heroic, masters of themselves, no less than of the universe, and with this ideal in mind, Corneille could not allow any weakness to creep in, and particularly not so great a weakness as to bring a hero to his downfall.

From the heroes of his great period, Horace, Auguste, Polyeucte, Corneille has transferred the heroic, almost superhuman qualities, to obscure figures who are little more than automata. In Pertharite, not one of the characters is persuasive; Pertharite reappears, not to reclaim his throne, but to regain his wife, as he exclaims in ll. 1023 ff. He even sacrifices this last happiness, and seeks only to die





and leave Rodelinde to be the wife of the usurping king (ll. 1420 ff.). That such was not the outcome of the tragedy was not due to any efforts of Pertharite, but to the improbable change in Grimoald's character. Grimoald loves Rodelinde more for her claims to the throne than for herself, yet he, of his own choice, hands over the kingdom to Pertharite without any circumstance, external or psychological, which would cause him to act thus. Rodelinde wishes to be faithful to Pertharite, yet she finally consents to marry Grimoald on a condition that actually destroys the only ground on which we might have excused her action. Edouige has more humanity about her than any of the others, for she is truly consistent throughout in her love for Grimoald, yet she is weak and lacks the fiery passion of an Hermione.

Again Corneille sets up a situation and characters which we are to admire. But the surprising 'volte-face' of Grimoald at the end is not adequately prepared; it is only negatively so, in that Grimoald is never represented as a villain. The change of character is not 'vraisemblable' and does not leave us persuaded; it seems the action of a very weak character, rather than of an admirable hero, entirely lacking the grandeur which surrounds the clemency of Augustus. Each of the characters, particularly Grimoald and Rodelinde, makes his heart obey his intelligence. The whole play is well described by Lemaître (1) as "le plus fol étalage d'héroïsme, et qui paraît ne rien coûter à ces extraordinaires person-  
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1. Petit de Julleville, op. cit., IV, 314, 315.





nages---" and elsewhere he terms it a parody of Corneille. Corneille himself later recognized the fundamental error in this play, for in the Examen he says, "Ce qui l'a fait avorter au théâtre a été l'événement extraordinaire qui me l'avoit fait choisir".

All the Aristotelian elements are gone now, save Unity of Action. Corneille's innate dramatic sense furnished him with that first requisite of the playwright. But there is no longer any slightest attempt to conform to the Aristotelian 'dénouement', or to produce pity and fear in the audiences. It is not only intended that the characters should arouse admiration--this had been true of the masterpieces. They have now become either abstractions of the Human Will (Nicomède), or mere automatons who react to the Will of those around them (Pertharite). Verisimilitude has here found its antithesis, for neither the situation nor the characters are 'probable' in any sense of the word.

Yet even here, Corneille has been faithful to the Unities, those tyrants of incipient classicism. Unity of Action, we have said, was maintained, without episodes or shift of interest, Corneille to the contrary notwithstanding.(1) Unity of Time is limited to a single day, and no mention of the time element is made until the closing lines (1852):

Allons mettre en éclat cette grande journée.

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1. Cf. the Examen, where Corneille would see a shift of interest from Rodelinde in the first acts, to Pertharite later. But Rodelinde may be said to represent her husband before his appearance and to keep his claims before the audience.





This is sufficient evidence that Corneille was still conscious, even at the close of this period of active productivity, of the first dramatic rule he had learned from the critics, although he had pulled away from all other requirements of classical tragedy. Unity of Place is of the usual type and needs no comment.

This completes our discussion of the tragedies, and as we look back over our study, we cannot but observe that the length of our treatments has decreased almost steadily from the time we left Cinna and Polyeucte. This is not so much due to the fact that we omitted some material used in the earlier chapters, as it is to the fact which we have endeavored to develop from these studies, that Corneille's Aristotelianism decreases steadily and rapidly after his four masterpieces.





## CHAPTER XVI - THE DISCOURS AND EXAMENS

In this chapter, we shall trace briefly the dramatic theories of Corneille as he himself formulated them in 1660 in the Discours and Examens. The Discours (1) are three essays which form a kind of 'Poetic Art' by themselves, and the Examens are critical prefaces which Corneille placed before each of his plays in the 1660 edition. The Discours were actually written before the Examens, and at many points, they anticipate certain comments which are to be repeated later, in considering the individual plays. Each Discours has a full title: Discours de l'Utilité et des Parties du Poème Dramatique, Discours de la Tragédie, et des Moyens de la Traiter selon le Vraisemblable ou le Nécessaire, and Discours des Trois Unités d'Action, de Jour, et de Lieu. These titles, however, do not completely indicate the nature of each essay. The first deals with the general purpose of dramatic poetry, with Plot and Character in both Tragedy and Comedy; the second with Verisimilitude; and the third with the Aristotelian Katharsis and the Unities. In this presentation we shall return to the order of topics followed in Chapter I, since here again, we shall be repeating Corneille's own words, without any deductive analysis on our part. We shall merely resume, in order, Cornei-

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1. The immediate occasion for writing the Discours was the publication of d'Aubignac's Pratique du Théâtre in 1657, to which The Discours were to be an answer.





lle's precepts on Verisimilitude, Katharsis, Plot, Character, and Unities. This will enable us to make more striking the contrasts with Aristotle's doctrine.

Early in the first Discours, Corneille expresses a respectful discipleship towards both Aristotle and Horace - it is to be noted that from the first, Horace takes his place at the side of the Greek master. But Corneille regrets the lack of completeness and clarity in the two Poetics: "Il faut donc savoir quelles sont ces règles; mais notre malheur est qu'Aristote et Horace après lui en ont écrit assez obscurément pour avoir besoin d'interprètes, et que ceux qui leur en ont voulu servir jusques ici ne les ont souvent expliquées qu'en grammairiens ou en philosophes. Comme ils avoient plus d'étude et de spéculation que d'expérience du théâtre, leur lecture nous peut rendre plus doctes, mais non pas nous donner beaucoup de lumières fort sûres pour y réussir." This last sentence gives us immediately the point of view of the dramatist, whose first thought is for the stage itself. Similarly, in the last paragraph of the same Discours, Corneille says again: "Je tâche de suivre toujours le sentiment d'Aristote dans les matières qu'il a traitées;.....Le commentaire dont je m'y sers le plus est l'expérience du théâtre et les réflexions sur ce que j'ai vu y plaire et déplaire." Writing as he did, after his great successes, Corneille was emboldened at times to formulate new theories, which he knew were not in Aristotle, but far more often, he seeks to make his ideas conform to the





rules laid down in the Greek Poetics.

### VERISIMILITUDE

The second Discours which is devoted to the theory of Verisimilitude, shows very clearly how false an interpretation Corneille gave to the Aristotelian rule of 'probability or necessity'. Whereas we have seen in our first chapter that these two terms are inseparable and have identical meanings, both referring to the logical working out of the laws of Nature, Corneille considered them as entirely distinct one from the other. This matter is of such fundamental importance that it will be permissible to give in full the passage from the Discours (1): "Je dis donc premièrement que cette liberté qu'il nous laisse d'embellir les actions historiques par des inventions vraisemblables n'emporte aucune défense de nous écarter du vraisemblable dans le besoin. C'est un privilège qu'il nous donne, et non pas une servitude qu'il nous impose: cela est clair par ses paroles mêmes. Si nous pouvons traiter les choses selon le vraisemblable ou selon le nécessaire, nous pouvons quitter le vraisemblable pour suivre le nécessaire; et cette alternative met en notre choix de nous servir de celui des deux que nous jugerons le plus à propos." The first error is in the subordination of the probable to the historic - "c'est l'histoire qui persuade avec empire" is Corneille's constant refrain. For Corneille the 'vraisemblable'

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1. Discours de la Tragédie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 81, 82.





is inferior to the 'vrai', and, far from being the ideal towards which the poet should strive, is merely to be used as a poetic fiction when the historical material does not suffice. The necessary also is a poetic fiction, which exonerates the poet from following either the historic or the probable. The necessary Corneille understands to mean those dramatic fictions, especially in time and place, to which the poet often finds himself compelled. This separation of the 'vraisemblable' and the 'nécessaire' is continued throughout the discussion and Corneille undertakes to determine when the one should be followed and when the other. The general conclusion is that the Unities often lead the poet away from the 'vraisemblable': "L'obéissance que nous devons aux règles de l'unité de jour et de lieu nous dispense alors du vraisemblable, bien qu'elle ne nous permette pas l'impossible; mais nous ne tombons pas toujours dans cette nécessité; et la Suivante, Cinna, Théodore, et Nicomède, n'ont pas eu besoin de s'écarter de la vraisemblance à l'égard du temps...." And yet, we shall recall that it was in the name of Verisimilitude that the Renaissance critics first formulated these same Unities!

Corneille then analyses the possible kinds of 'Vraisemblance' and finds two main divisions, (1) each of which he subdivides in turn: the 'vraisemblable général et particulier' and

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1. Loc. cit., 88.





the 'vraisemblable ordinaire et extraordinaire'. The first has reference to types, such as the characteristics to be attributed to a king or a general, or a lover; the second to individuals, as Alexander, or Caesar. The third kind, 'le vraisemblable ordinaire', covers those actions which are reasonably frequent in occurrence, and the 'vraisemblable extraordinaire' refers to those actions which are not frequent in occurrence, but still well within possibility. In this minute analysis of Verisimilitude, Corneille goes beyond Aristotle, who contented himself with the general exposition of the doctrine. Corneille never grasped the difference between the two kinds of 'possible'. That which is merely 'possible' in terms of human life, Aristotle had rejected from Tragedy, because it lacks that element of universality which is indicated by the Aristotelian 'probable', applied to the broad, general, unchanging laws of Nature. When Aristotle said, "It is probable that many things should happen contrary to probability," he was expressing the two meanings of the term. But Corneille, far from seeing that distinction, considers that such actions should not be termed 'probable' but 'necessary': (1) The 'necessary'; Corneille then defines as 'le besoin du poète pour arriver à son but ou pour y faire arriver ses acteurs.'

All these erroneous ideas with regard to Verisimilitude are the direct result of the Renaissance criticism on the seventeenth-  
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 1. Discours de la Tragédie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 92.





th-century writers. We have seen that Aristotle's aesthetic viewpoint, with its conceptions of Universality, gave way before the materialistic, factual, moralizing spirit of the Renaissance. Thus it was entirely natural that, for Corneille, Truth was a higher authority for the poet than Verisimilitude. It is in this conviction that he writes (1): "... les grands sujets .... doivent toujours aller au delà du vraisemblable; et ne trouveroient aucune croyance parmi les auditeurs s'ils n'étoient soutenus, ou par l'autorité de l'histoire qui persuade avec empire, ou par la préoccupation de l'opinion commune qui nous donne ces memes auditeurs déjà tous persuadés." Aristotle, on the other hand, had expressly said that history was a lesser 'genre' than poetry, since it narrated but particular incidents, while poetry expressed the universal.

### KATHARSIS

As with Verisimilitude, so with the other topics in our discussion, we shall find that Corneille was in constant opposition with Aristotle, in most cases either unconsciously or reluctantly so. This is nowhere more apparent than in the matter of Katharsis. We have seen, first, that Corneille was in no position to comprehend an aesthetic Katharsis, and with the pressure of the Italian critics upon him, it was

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 15.





natural that he should accept unquestioningly the moral, didactic interpretation. And secondly, we have seen in our studies of the plays themselves that Corneille never produced plots or characters such as to arouse the Aristotelian Fear and Pity. These two conditions made it inevitable that Corneille should not be fitted to conform, even in theory, to the Aristotelian doctrine in this respect. Fortunately for Corneille, this was one of the most obscure passages in the Poetics and he has all freedom to develop his own notions in this matter.

Corneille combines, from the first, the Aristotelian and the Horatian doctrines. While expressing Aristotle's theory that the sole purpose of dramatic poetry is the pleasure of the spectators (1), he is equally ready to grant the moral purpose added by Horace (2): "Ainsi, quoique l'utile n'y entre que sous la forme du délectable, il ne laisse pas d'y être nécessaire, et il vaut mieux examiner de quelle façon il y peut trouver sa place, que d'agiter --- une question inutile touchant l'utilité de cette sorte de poèmes." Then follows the descriptions of the four means of moral uplift afforded in Tragedy: 1, the use of moral maxims; 2, the portrayal of vices and virtues; 3, the punishment of the wicked and reward of the good; 4, the purgation of the passions through pity and fear.

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 13.

2. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 17.





This last has lost entirely the preeminent position it held with Aristotle: in the Greek text the arousing of Pity and Fear was the distinctive function of Tragedy, and now this has been reduced to a level with the portrayal of vices and virtues! Corneille was never fully persuaded that the power of Tragedy was strong enough to purge men of the passions of pity and fear (1): "Si la purgation des passions se fait dans la tragédie, je tiens qu'elle se doit faire de la manière que je l'explique: mais je doute si elle s'y fait jamais, et dans celles-là même qui ont les conditions que demande Aristote... et j'ai bien peur que le raisonnement d'Aristote sur ce point ne soit qu'une belle idée, qui n'ait jamais son effet dans la vérité." While he did not perhaps recognize the aesthetic basis of the Aristotelian phrase, Corneille did realize that it was futile to attempt to free the human race, or any group of persons, from the natural emotions of Pity and Fear. He therefore substituted for this enigmatical 'purgation of the passions', the more attainable object of depicting the reward of virtue and the punishment of wickedness. This had a necessary effect on Plot, which we shall mention in our next section.

But Corneille came to create a type of Tragedy different from any known to Aristotle -- the Tragedy of Admiration. While

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1. Discours de la Tragédie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 57, 58.





we have shown that, from the Cid on, all the Cornelian heroes called forth Admiration, not Pity nor Fear, Corneille himself seems slow to recognize this fact. It is not before the Préface to Nicomède that Corneille sets Admiration on a level with Pity (1), but in the Examen to this same play, he has the courage of his conviction and adds a paragraph on his new theory: "Dans l'admiration qu'on a pour sa (2) vertu, je trouve une manière de purger les passions dont n'a point parle Aristote, et qui est peut-etre plus sure que celle qu'il prescrit a la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte. L'amour qu'elle nous donne pour cette vertu que nous admirons, nous imprime de la haine pour le vice contraire." Highly moralizing still, this type of tragedy is more intrinsically Cornelian than the Aristotelian tragedy, founded on pity and fear. We have traced the origins of this theory of Admiration to Minturno (3), but we determined in an earlier chapter that Minturno had in mind a quite different type of Admiration (4) from that which Corneille develops. It is curious to note that in the Discours, no mention is made of Admiration, but several pages are devoted to Pity and Fear. This would make it seem that the Discours were a commentary on Aristotle's Poetics rather than an 'exposé' of Corneille's own

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1. Quoted above, Ch. XIV, pp. 228, 229.

2. Of. Nicomède.

3. Cf. supra, Ch. II, pp. 33 ff. .

4. Cf. supra, Ch. II, pp. 33 ff. .





theories, in spite of the following statement near the opening of the first Discours: "Je .... dirai mes pensées tout simplement, sans esprit de contestation que m'engage à les soutenir....."

### PLOT

After the discussion of the purpose of Tragedy, Corneille proceeds to the subjects of Tragedy. Here it is that we find his definition of tragic action (1): "Sa dignité demande quelque grand intérêt d'Etat, ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition ou la vengeance, et veut donner à craindre des malheurs plus grands que la perte d'une maîtresse." This he supports by the practice of the Ancients. He then makes his classification of Comedy, Tragedy, and 'heroic comedy' on the double basis of the actions and the persons portrayed: slight action with mediocre characters gives comedy; serious action and noble persons produces Tragedy; and the combination of less serious action with lofty persons, gives a hybrid type which he names 'heroic comedy', and which he exemplifies by his own Don Sanche. His definition of Tragedy is partly Aristotelian: "la tragédie veut pour son sujet une action illustre, extraordinaire, sérieuse", with "de grand périls pour ses héros", and the action must be "complète et achevée" (2). As for the 'dénouement', Corneille expressly says (3): "...nous avons le choix de faire un changement de bonheur en malheur, ou de mal-

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 24.
  2. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 25, 26.
  3. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 31.





heur en bonheur". Such was not Aristotle's dictum. How far Corneille was influenced by the Italian critics, particularly Castelvetro, cannot be known, but it is safe to suppose that reflections on his own plays led Corneille to this attitude.

It is again a conscious addition to Aristotle's theory, when Corneille specifies that the first act must either introduce, or at least make reference to, all actions and persons who are to appear in the later parts of the tragedy. "Cette maxime est nouvelle et assez sévère, et je ne l'ai pas toujours gardée; mais j'estime qu'elle sert beaucoup à fonder une véritable unité d'action, par la liaison de toutes celles qui concourent dans le poème." (1) We have seen this theory in practice in Théodore where Didyme was mentioned several times, ostensibly to foreshadow the later action. We have also seen in Don Sanche that Corneille did not prepare for Don Raymond nor the fisherman. Corneille repeats Aristotle in condemning extraneous episodes and personages, and does not hesitate to class the Infants in the number (2).

In admitting the happy ending to Tragedy, and in making these several detailed requirements of Plot, Corneille has distinctly constructed his own theories, quite independently from Aristotle.

### CHARACTER

Corneille begins his comments on Character by stating the four conditions required by Aristotle, to which he gives

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I. 42.
  2. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I. 48.





the French terms we have been following in this study: 'bonne', 'convenable', 'semblable', and 'égale'. This requirement that the characters be 'good' is most disconcerting to Corneille in the face of his own Médée and Cléopâtre. He comments (1): "je ne puis comprendre comment on a voulu entendre par ce mot de bonnes, qu'il faut qu'elles soient vertueuses" and adds his own explanation: "je crois que c'est le caractère brillant et élevée d'une habitude vertueuse ou criminelle, selon qu'elle est propre et convenable à la personne qu'on introduit." From what we have said on this matter in our first chapter, (2) we may conclude that in this instance Corneille came nearer than his contemporaries and predecessors to the true intent of Aristotle, but he was enabled to do this only by laying aside his strictly moral views of Tragedy. In speaking of Cléopâtre in Rodogune, he admits that she is "très-méchante", but "tous ses crimes sont accompagnés d'une grandeur d'âme qui a quelque chose de si haut, qu'en meme temps qu'on deteste ses actions, on admire la source dont elles partent." The same might be said of Médée. If these characters had been criticized by Aristotle, it would not have been on moral grounds, but for that very 'grandeur d'âme', which makes of them invincible, super-human figures.

The term 'convenable' Corneille understands in its true significance. 'Semblable' he misunderstands, as is natural from

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 31.

2. Cf. supra, Ch. I, pp. 18 ff.





his misinterpretation of the principle of Verisimilitude. He considers it to apply only to those characters taken from history or legend, and who must be portrayed according to the accepted notions of them. Corneille never suspects that there is anything else behind this term, and even wonders at those critics who have puzzled over it.(1): "Ainsi ces deux qualités(2) dont quelques interprètes ont beaucoup de peine à trouver la différence qu'Aristote veut qui soit entre elles sans la désigner, s'accorderont aisément, pourvu qu'on les sépare, et qu'on donne celle de convenables aux personnes imaginées, .... en réservant l'autre pour celles qui sont connues par l'histoire ou par la fable...." It was not possible for Corneille to grasp the larger aspect of the term 'semblable' or 'true to life' which we have described in our analysis of the Greek Poetics.

The term 'égal' gives no difficulty, and Corneille names Chimene as an example of a character who is 'inégalement égale'. In our discussions of the tragedies we never found that Corneille's characters lacked consistency - (except in the case of Chimène). Both in practice and in theory Corneille understood and accepted this precept.

One of the important points on which Aristotle and Corneille are at variance, is with respect to the perfect character. Aristotle rejects the perfect hero from Tragedy, and we

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1. Discours du Poème Dramatique, Marty-Laveaux, I, 37.
  2. 'Convenable' and 'semblable'.





have seen the reason for this in our first chapter (1). Corneille comments (2): "L'exclusion des personnes tout à fait vertueuses qui tombent dans le malheur bannit les martyrs de notre théâtre. Polyeucte y a réussi contre cette maxime..." In the Examen of Polyeucte, he devotes a long paragraph to this matter, citing Minturno, among others, who, as we have seen (3), admitted Christ and the martyrs on the stage.

In the matter of Character, then, Corneille misinterprets, or disagrees with, Aristotle on the two fundamental requirements: that they be not wholly good, and that they be 'semblables' or 'true to life'. Both these discrepancies are directly attributable to Corneille's failure to grasp the aesthetic nature of Aristotle's criticism. This is self-evident as regards the term 'semblable': and if it were not for a certain moral concern, Corneille would not have stressed the 'admirable' hero to such an extent.

### UNITIES

To the all-important Unities, Corneille devotes the whole of the third Discours. He discusses them in the Aristotelian order - if such we may call it -, and it is interesting also to note the proportion of the essay devoted to each of the three Unities. In the Marty-Laveaux edition, this Discours covers twenty-five pages, of which fourteen deal with the Unity of Action, six with Time, and five with Place. Again this would seem

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1. Cf. supra, Ch. I. p. 18.

2. Discours de la Tragédie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 59.

3. Cf. supra, Ch. II, p. 37.





to indicate that Corneille was following rather Aristotle's own Poetics than his own practice. Certain it is, that in his plays, the Unity of Time loomed very large.

The Discours opens with the definition of the Unity of Action: ".....l'unité d'action consiste ..... en l'unité de péril dans la tragédie, soit que son héros y succombe, soit qu'il en sorte". Then follows the well-known passage in which a second peril is admitted "pourvu que de l'un on tombe nécessairement dans l'autre." He finds the second peril in Horsace and Théodore faulty, since he says that there was no necessity for them. In our studies of these plays, we have shown that there was an inherent necessity of character, as well as a dramatic or historic necessity, which actually required the second peril. More Aristotelian is the next comment made, that all actions must result from some preceding action or situation in the Plot. The source of this dictum is the passage from the Poetics already quoted (1), which requires that all Reversals or Recognitions "arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action". But Corneille adds to this precept an interpretation quite his own, of which we have already spoken in the section on Plot, namely, that in order to have such logical relationship, all actions should be anticipated in the first Act. Of this, Corneille says (2): "Cette règle.... bien qu'elle soit nouvelle et contre l'usage des anciens, a son fondement sur deux

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1. Cf. supra, Ch. I, p. 15.

2. Discours des Trois Unités, Marty-Laveaux, I, 101.





passages ~~de~~ d'Aristote", and he quotes the above passage from the Poetics. This indicates well Corneille's tendency to particularize Aristotle's doctrine. Whereas Aristotle was a critic, Corneille never ceases to be a playwright, and he has constantly in mind the requirements of actual construction and production of a play. He feels the need for more specific guidance than Aristotle had given, or than any of the Italian commentators had added in their larger works.

One of the results of this preoccupation with dramaturgic details, was the theory of the 'liaison de scènes', an offspring of the Unity of Action, but totally unknown to Aristotle's theory. Corneille admits that it is but an "ornement et non pas une règle" (1) and was not observed by the ancients nor even by his own predecessors. But, he adds, "ce qui n'étoit point une règle autrefois l'est devenu maintenant par l'assiduité de la pratique." (2)

Similarly, in his comments on the 'nœud' or complication of the Plot, Corneille gives suggestions for the construction of a Plot. He would advise as little narration as possible of preceding action, as this burdens the minds of the spectators. He instances Héraclius as an example of those plays which require "un extraordinaire effort à l'attention du spectateur, et l'empêchent souvent de prendre un plaisir entier aux premières représentations, tant ils le fatiguent." (3) For the 'dénouement', he repeats Aristotle's admonitions against a mere

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1. Discours des Trois Unités, Marty-Laveaux, I, 101.

2. Ibid., 102.

3. Ibid., 105.





change of mind on the part of the characters, and against a 'Deus ex machina'. It is curious to note here how he spares his own Médée: "Mais je trouve un peu de rigueur au sentiment d'Aristote, qui met en même rang le char dont Médée se sert pour s'enfuir de Corinthe après la vengeance qu'elle a prise de Créon. Il me semble que c'en est un assez grand fondement que de l'avoir faite magicienne, et d'en avoir rapporté dans le poème des actions autant au-dessus des forces de la nature que celle-là. Après qu'elle a rajeuni son père Eson depuis son retour,.....ce char volant n'est point hors de la vraisemblance; et ce poème n'a point besoin d'autre préparation pour cet effet extraordinaire." But the flying chariot remains still a 'Deus ex Machina' and, as such, is not within the requirements of Aristotle.

Corneille goes so far as to indicate, in general at least, what is to be included in the several acts of the play, and the number of scenes per act -- again considerations of the author, not of the critic. From Aristotle's statement that a tragedy should be so constructed that the reader could receive as vivid an impression as the spectator, Corneille derives the suggestion that stage directions should be printed with the plays! And it is in this manner that Corneille ends his comments on the Unity of Action -- it would seem that he had wandered somewhat from the topic.

At the beginning of the discussion of the Unity of Time, Cor-





neille comments on the divergent interpretations of Aristotle's "revolution of the sun", and promptly states his preference for the twenty-four interpretation. He would even extend this when necessary: "je trouve qu'il y a des sujets si malaisés à renfermer en si peu de temps, que non-seulement je leur accorderois les vingt-quatre heures entières, mais je me servirois meme de la licence que donne ce philosophe Aristote de les excéder un peu, et les pousserois sans scrupule jusqu'à trente." After the difficulties which, as we have seen, confronted Corneille in the writing of his own plays in this connection, we are not a little surprised to find him defending the Unity of Time against detractors: "Beaucoup déclament contre cette règle, qu'il nomment tyrannique, et auroient raison, si elle n'étoit fondée que sur l'autorité d'Aristote; mais ce qui la doit faire accepter, c'est la raison naturelle qui lui sert d'appui." And he continues in the vein of Scaliger or Castelvetro: "La représentation dure deux heures, et ressembleroit parfaitement, si l'action qu'elle représente n'en demandoit pas davantage pour sa réalité. Aussi ne nous arrêtons point ni aux douze, ni aux vingt-quatre heures; mais resserrons l'action du poème dans la moindre durée qu'il nous sera possible, afin que sa représentation ressemble mieux et soit plus parfaite. Ne donnons, s'il se peut, à l'une que les deux heures que l'autre remplit." After this flight of idealism, so to speak, he returns once more to the necessities of play-writing, and advises that the time element be left indefinite, and receive no mention in the verses of the play. We have found instances, how-





ever, in which Corneille had not observed this injunction in writing his <sup>R</sup>agedies. It is in this connection that he reproaches himself with a passage in the Cid: "je me suis toujours repenti d'avoir fait dire au Roi, dans le Cid, qu'il vouloit que Rodrigue se délassât une heure ou deux après la défaite des Maures avant que de combattre Don Sanche: je l'avois fait pour montrer que la pièce étoit dans les vingt-quatre heures; et cela n'a servi qu'à avertir les spectateurs de la contrainte avec laquelle je l'y ai réduite. Si j'avois fait résoudre ce combat sans en désigner l'heure, peut-être n'y auroit-on pas pris garde." (1) Already in the Discours de la Tragédie, in the discussion of 'Vraisemblance', the Unities of Time and Place had found mention: "Pour plaire selon les règles de son art, il a besoin de renfermer son action dans l'unité de jour et de lieu" and he adds that this is "d'une nécessité absolue et indispensable."

As for the Unity of Place, Corneille admits that he finds no such precept in Aristotle, nor in Horace. Yet this in nowise deters him from the strict interpretation of the rule. He blames those who would permit places so far distant that it would require twenty-four hours to go between them, although we have observed that he had permitted himself this licence in at least one of his early comedies. (2) As for Time, Corneille advocates also the strictest interpretation of the Unity of Place: "Je souhaiterois, pour ne point gêner du tout le spectateur, que ce

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1. Discours de la Tragédie, Marty-Laveaux, I, 96.

2. Cf. supra, Ch. IV, p. 63.





qu'on fait représenter devant lui en deux heures se pût passer en effet en deux heures, et que ce qu'on lui fait voir sur un théâtre qui ne change point, pût s'arrêter dans une chambre ou dans une salle, ---; mais souvent cela est si malaisé, pour ne pas dire impossible, qu'il faut de nécessité trouver quelque élargissement pour le lieu, comme pour le temps." Even more than the Unity of Time, that of Place is surrounded by a whole framework of stage-business, and Corneille covers several pages with suggestions whereby an appearance of unity may be preserved without wholly disregarding logic. His conclusion is this: "Je tiens donc qu'il faut chercher cette unité exacte autant qu'il est possible; mais comme elle ne s'accomode pas avec toute sorte de sujets, j'accorderois très-volontiers que ce qu'on feroit passer en une seule ville auroit l'unité de lieu." And then he begins to delimit this broad interpretation, and would permit but two or three particular points in that city. To make this duplicity of place,--he recognizes it as such -- more acceptable, he would have the change occur between acts, not within acts; the decoration should remain the same for both; and only the general place-name should be given. But this still leaves a difficulty, for persons who are enemies cannot speak out their secrets in the same room successively, and yet it often happens that such persons appear in the same act. To obviate this 'invraisemblance', Corneille resorts to a remarkable plan. "Les jurisconsultes admettent des fictions de droit; et je voudrois, à leur exemple, introduire des fictions de théâtre, pour établir un lieu théâtral qui ne seroit ni l'appartement de Cléo-





pâtre, ni celui de Rodogune dans la pièce qui porte ce titre, ni celui de Phocas, de Léontine, ou de Pulchérie, dans Méraclius, mais une salle sur laquelle ouvrent ces divers appartements, à qui j'attribuerois deux privileges: l'un, que chacun de ceux qui y parleroient fût présumé y parler avec le même secret que s'il étoit dans sa chambre; l'autre, qu'au lieu que dans l'ordre commun il est quelquefois de la bienséance que ceux qui occupent le théâtre aillent trouver ceux qui sont dans leur cabinet....., ceux-ci pussent les venir trouver sur le théâtre, sans choquer cette bienséance, afin de conserver l'unité de lieu...." The first and last sentences of the concluding paragraph of this Discours typify well Corneille's half-defiant, half-submissive attitude in the matter of the Unities: "Beaucoup de mes pièces en(1) man<sup>g</sup>ueront si l'on ne veut point admettre cette modération, dont je me contenterai toujours à l'avenir, quand je ne pourrai satisfaire à la dernière rigueur de la règle..... Je ne doute point qu'il ne soit aisé d'en (2) trouver de meilleurs moyens, et je serai tout prêt de les suivre lorsqu'on les aura mis en pratique aussi heureusement qu'on y a<sup>vu</sup> les miens." In the Examen to Mélite, Corneille tells us that, as early as this first play, he had kept the scene within the limits of one city: "Ce sens commun, qui étoit toute ma règle,.....m'avoit donné assez d'aversion de cet horrible dérèglement qui mettoit Paris, Rome et Con-

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1. Unity of Place.

2. Of making the practice conform to the rules.





stantinople sur le même théâtre, pour réduire le mien dans une seule ville." And while he never did go so far as to represent two cities on the stage simultaneously, or even successively, in the same play, we have seen that he did go beyond the limits of one city, in Clitandre, and admit also the use of a neighboring forest. We have seen how widely Corneille's practice varied as regards Place in his plays before the Cid; but after Cinna he regularly uses the indefinite 'palais à volonté', which, despite its many 'invraisemblances', saved Corneille much casuistical explanation.

In this chapter we have devoted more time to a discussion of the Unities than to any other of our topics, just as Corneille himself had done. This will bring before our minds once again the tremendous importance this almost totally pseudo-Aristotelian precept had gained in the early seventeenth century. Let us review now hastily, the relationship between this body of poetic doctrine which Corneille constructed, and the original Poetics of Aristotle. On the matter of Verisimilitude, Corneille was at utter variance with Aristotle. This was the result, we have said, of Renaissance criticism, and it is due to the theories of a Scaliger and a Castelvetro, who both advocated seeking an illusion of reality in subjects and their treatment, that the conception of 'Nature's unfulfilled intentions' was lost. Likewise, in considering Katharsis, we have seen that Corneille never suspected the possibility of an aesthetic interpretation, and was blithely





unconscious that the didactic function was an invention of Horace, accepted and developed by the Renaissance critics. In Plot, the chief points of difference between Aristotle's theory and Corneille's, are the 'dénouement', for Corneille admits in theory as well as in practice, the happy ending; the predominance and preference which Corneille gives to the historical plot. The wholly minor precepts for construction of plots, which are given in the Discours for the guidance of the playwright, are contrary to the type of higher criticism represented by Aristotle's Poetics. It follows naturally after his misconception of Verisimilitude and Katharsis, that Corneille should view Character differently from Aristotle. If the function of Tragedy is didactic, there is no longer any reason for not portraying the perfect character on the stage. We have seen the misinterpretation of the term 'semblable' or 'true to life' which is inherent in Corneille's system. On all fundamental matters of doctrine, then, Corneille is at variance with Aristotle, and since the Unities are not Aristotelian, nor in the spirit of Aristotle, there remains no point of true contact between the two critics, despite Corneille's long, and painstaking efforts to prove himself a devoted disciple of the Master of Criticism.





### CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters we have endeavored to show the relationship between Aristotle's theory of tragedy and the practice of Corneille. In order to do this, we analysed first Aristotle's Poetics, and saw that the basis of his whole doctrine was Verisimilitude, by which was meant conformity to the laws of nature. All other requirements of Plot and Character were deduced either from this basic law, or from the doctrine of Purgation or Katharsis. The latter should mean an arousing in the spectator, of Pity and Fear so as to lessen the petty, personal element in these emotions, and raise them to a point of universality. Above all, we noted that the Poetics was not a dogmatic body of rules, nor was it abstract criticism, but rather a commentary on the practice of the dramatic poets who had preceded Aristotle's time.

Between Aristotle's Poetics and the Renaissance commentaries, we mentioned briefly Horace's Ars Poetica, which was to be fused with the Greek treatise. Horace was far more dogmatic in his method, and in this respect he prepared the way for the Renaissance critics. The most important, far-reaching contribution of Horace to dramatic theory was his view of the didactic function in Poetry, particularly Tragedy. For Horace,





the poet was the great teacher and moral guide of mankind. This theory was to be accepted in full by the Renaissance, and passed on to the seventeenth century in France. From our brief study of the Renaissance critics, we were made aware of the vast changes wrought in the original doctrine of Aristotle. Verisimilitude became confused with reality; all conception of conformity to an ideal was lost. The Aristotelian Katharsis was not comprehensible to these rationalizing critics, and for it was substituted the ethical Purgation of Horace's doctrine, by which the audiences were to be freed of the troublesome passions of Pity and Fear. To this was added also a new doctrine, the theory of Admiration in Tragedy, in which the Renaissance critics saw an effective means of moral uplift. The pseudo-Aristotelian theory of the three Unities was constructed and imposed in the name of false Verisimilitude. Not only had the Italian critics fused the doctrines of the Ars Poetica of Horace with the Poetics of Aristotle: they had deliberately 'invented' new theories and transformed others at will.

It was this pseudo-Aristotelian doctrine that was introduced into France in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century. It met with great favor among the critics. The greatest opposition came from the stage managers, who were unwilling to cast off the expensive stage-settings used in the multiplex scenery for the mystery plays and tragedies of the sixteenth century. Through the favor of Cardinal





Richelieu and a few powerful literary patrons, Chapelain and his group were about to impose these Italian theories upon playwrights and stage-managers alike. The Silvanire of Mairet marked the actual introduction of the theories into the tragedies themselves.

Such was the situation in 1630 when Corneille presented his first play, Mélite. But, living as he did in Rouen, away from the literary circles of Paris, Corneille was not at this time posted on matters of criticism. In part he was guided by his own genius; also, he imitated Hardy, his greatest predecessor on the French stage. In his next plays (before Médée), Corneille showed an acquaintance with the rule of the Unities, although he did not adhere to it in more than half of these plays. The Unities alone seem to have composed the sum total of dramatic criticism at this time for Corneille, and in the prefaces of these early comedies there is no mention of any other precept. In Médée, his first tragedy, Corneille showed himself a docile imitator of Seneca without any concern for the rules, or supposed rules, of Aristotle. The plot, the 'dénouement', and the character of Medea, are all contrary to Aristotelian requirements. It is apparent that at this time Corneille had not come into any very close contact with the critics, nor had he studied directly the Poetics of Aristotle.

In our study we have devoted by far the longest chapter to the Cid, for with the Cid comes the first great break in Corneille's literary career. In this tragi-comedy (in its treatment





more tragedy than comedy), we have seen Corneille's first efforts towards creating the psychological drama which he was to bring to a high point of perfection in less than a decade. The Cid gives evidence of the greatest solicitude for the Unities, and contains also certain reminiscences of Aristotelian doctrine in the handling of the Plot and Characters. In making a drama of the 'inner type' from the epic, colorful play of De Castro, Corneille was following, though no doubt unconsciously, Aristotle's dictum that the poet should transform the material furnished him by history or legend. But we have seen that the Cid still retained much that was novelistic, much that was tragi-comic. Corneille had not yet reached the point of depicting merely 'characters in action', without a background. The characters of the Cid are far from Aristotelian: they lack the 'fatal flaw' and end triumphantly. Neither the plot nor the characters are Aristotelian in the true sense of the term, since both are lacking in Verisimilitude. Already in the Cid, we found that the Aristotelian Katharsis had been set aside (if indeed it had ever occurred to Corneille), and a new function had been assigned to Tragedy; to arouse the admiration of the audience for the characters. This theory of admiration has been attributed to Minturno, but Minturno had in mind rather 'wonder' at the poet's skill in invention. Corneille, on the other hand, arouses admiration for the heroism of his characters. This was an inherent element in his genius and if he invokes the authority of Min-





turno, it is only long after he had produced his best plays. Corneille was certainly unaware of a difference between his use of Admiration and Minturno's term Ammirazione, so that when he adduces the text of Minturno, he is entirely sincere. Admiration is an original trait with Corneille and remains the outstanding feature of the Cornelian drama. Although his contemporaries later wrote plays of the same type, they did not recognize that Corneille had definitely created a new and powerful type of tragedy. It was not until 1700 that Boileau in a letter to Charles Perrault (1) recognized the essentially original quality of Corneille's genius. Having admitted, or rather asserted, that Corneille was the inventor of a new type of tragedy, Boileau explains his position thus: "Car c'est sur ce pied, à mon avis, qu'on doit regarder quantité de ses plus belles pièces de théâtre, où se mettant au-dessus des règles de ce philosophe (2), il n'a point songé, comme les poètes de l'ancienne tragédie, à émouvoir la pitié et la terreur, mais à exciter dans l'âme des spectateurs, par la sublimité et par la beauté des sentiments, une certaine admiration....."

In the Cid, Corneille had marked out the pathway he was to follow in his career as tragic poet. All his dramas are of the 'inner' type, yet with a novelistic element which decreases in the masterpieces, but grows again rapidly in importance in the romanesque plays such as Rodogune and Héraclius. The charac-

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1. Quoted in Rigal, De Jodelle à Molière, p. 287.

2. Aristotle.





ters are heroic, men and women alike, with but few exceptions. They react to a neo-Platonic psychology and are guided by a 'grandeur d'âme' which makes them superhuman. We have seen in every case that the Cornelian tragedies arouse Admiration rather than Pity and Fear, as the natural result of this dramatic system. Corneille sought always illustrious, extraordinary incidents, in order that he might set his characters in more striking relief. It is the characters themselves rather than the situations, which interest Corneille, contrary to Aristotle who set Plot above Character. In every fundamental matter of theory Corneille is opposed to Aristotle: he did not grasp the aesthetic conception of poetry which is at the basis of Aristotle's Poetics, nor could he comprehend the fatalistic attitude of the Greeks toward Human Nature. But to the un-Aristotelian plot and characters, Corneille sought always to add one pseudo-Aristotelian element, the Unities. In the plays before the Cid, three had conformed to the contemporary interpretation of the Unities, and in the Cid, we have seen indubitable evidences of the author's solicitude on this score.

In Horace Corneille produced his most Aristotelian play, since the 'dénouement' was at least half tragic, and Horace had a fatal flaw which led him to crime. But even here, we saw that Corneille could not make the plot truly Aristotelian, since he was unwilling to bring his hero to a downfall and misery. On account of the more concentrated plot, Corneille





was enabled to handle the Unities more successfully in this play than in the Cid.

In Cinna, the partially Aristotelian qualities of Horace are already gone -- there is no longer any fatal flaw or frailty in the character of Augustus. The plot has a happy ending for all. The admiration we are to feel for Augustus is unbounded, and is still further removed from the Pity and Fear of Aristotle.

Polyeucte represents the true perfection of the Cornelian tragedy, although Corneille himself did not agree with this judgment. In this play, the 'grandeur d'âme' is counter-balanced by the human love which Polyeucte feels for Pauline; the 'dénouement' brings death to the hero, an ending which satisfies Aristotelian requirements, and Corneille as well, for this death is martyrdom, and martyrdom is a triumph of Will. Admiration is certainly the dominant note, yet there is still room for some pity and fear for the characters of Pauline and Sévère. There is still a very real element of struggle in the play; it is thoroughly psychological, but not abstract - it is still dramatic. It is in this play also that the Unities are observed most perfectly and with least straining.

After Polyeucte, the supreme effort towards the classic ideal, Corneille brought back into Tragedy those very elements which he had banished from it in his masterpieces after the Cid. Pompeé already foreshadows the series of later plays in





which the characters seem mere automatons, entirely lacking the flexibility and many-sidedness of real human beings. Théodore showed clearly Corneille's new tendencies. Instead of being another Polyeucte, Théodore was a miserable failure, due largely to the rigidity of the heroine who possessed no human qualities. In addition to this error, another one was creeping back upon Corneille: a natural fondness for the romanesque. This predilection was evidenced in Théodore by the combining of two legends to make a fuller, more complicated plot. The tendency towards romanesque plots became very marked in Rodogune and in Héraclius, where the situations presented were most 'invraisemblables'. Yet here still, the Unities were observed -- the one inviolable rule. Don Sanche continues the same type of romanesque plot, to which is now added a very conscious effort to arouse admiration for the hero. Nicomède is the culmination of this theory of the 'grandeur d'âme', which Corneille had been developing since he wrote Horace and Cinna. It would not perhaps be justifiable to say that he had this doctrine in mind when he wrote the Cid.

A tendency towards, and fondness for, romanesque complicated plots, with happy endings; heroic, superhuman characters, arousing, not Pity and Fear, but Admiration -- such are the inherent elements of Corneille's genius, reflected in the majority of his tragedies. These were the qualities most admired by the generation of Louis XIII -- the same generation





which enjoyed d'Urfé and La Calprenède, which applauded Condé and Richlieu, and produced Descartes. Corneille was a writer of his day and reflected faithfully the tastes of his audiences. When his audiences had changed, as they had when Corneille returned to the stage in 1659 with Oedipe, Corneille was faced with a series of failures. It is not just to state that Racine's rise in public favor sounded the death-knell to Corneille. A more correct statement is that the same circumstances which led to Corneille's downfall, led to Racine's success. Corneille's day had passed even before the appearance of Andromaque, or the unfortunate competition over Tite et Lérénice. As is splendidly stated by Professor Nitze (1): "The world-empire of Louis XIV was not romanesque but real, its dramas were externally unheroic in order to be internally the more intense." With the transition from the Age of Louis XIII to the Age of Louis XIV, Corneille, the exponent of Human Will, was forced to give way to Racine, the exponent of Human Sentiment. Racine was innately Aristotelian; he needed no lessons from the critics.

Corneille, on the other hand, was in opposition, by temperament, education, and environment, to the Aristotelian conception of Tragedy. In a strict classification of Corneille's dramas, according to Aristotle's requirements, none

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1. Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 254,





would be rightly called a tragedy, save perhaps Polyeucte and Théodore. The others are heroic comedies, as Corneille himself termed Don Sanche. Having failed to grasp the meaning of Poetic Truth, of the Aristotelian Katharsis, it was inevitable that Corneille should miss the import of Aristotle's more specific requirements for Plot and Character. The text of the Greek Poetics had become known to Corneille through the Italian commentators, who, long before its appearance in France, had quite transformed the Aristotelian doctrine. So strong were the influence and prestige of the Renaissance critics in France at this period, that it never occurred to Corneille when he formulated his own dramatic theories, to question their interpretations of Aristotle's words, nor even the several additions, which he recognized as such, made to the Greek text by the Italian commentators. Corneille accepted unquestioningly all the dogmatic precepts as they had originally been laid down by Scaliger and by Castelvetro, and resorted to these and other Italian critics when unable to justify his own practice from Aristotle's text. It cannot however be proven to any very great extent, whether Corneille actually took his theories from the Italian critics, or whether he merely used them in justification of doctrines which he had formulated in large part for himself.(1)

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1. The article by Prof. Colbert Searles entitled "Corneille and the Italian Doctrinaires" (Mod. Phil. XIII (1915) pp. 169-179) has shown in detail the similarities between certain passages from Corneille and the corresponding ones in the Italian critics. But Prof. Searles does not push too far the contention that Corneille took even these passages from the different Italian critics.





The Discours and Examens we found to be a curious mixture of deference towards Aristotle and his commentators (whom Corneille never separates unless the differences of doctrine be very striking), and of justification of his own practice where it was very obviously divergent from the established theories. The inevitable result was that the body of Corneille's theoretic writings presents neither a unified and coherent doctrine of dramatic writing, nor a true analysis of his own tragedies.

It is because Corneille learned Aristotle through the commentaries of the Italian critics, that he was led into so many erroneous interpretations of the text of the Greek Poetics. The original Corneille without the pressure of 'les doctes', would certainly not have been truly Aristotelian, but when we remember what he says as to his "sens commun" in the examen to Mélite, we are led to believe that this same "sens commun", had it been left unhampered, would have brought the poet to greater Verisimilitude than he did attain, guided as he was by the misinterpretations of Aristotle. If Verisimilitude is the basis of Aristotle's doctrine, we are justified in saying that Corneille would have been more essentially Aristotelian, had he never studied Aristotle.





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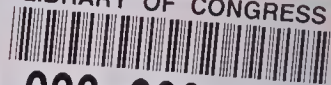
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